

## Summary:

After Mary dies, John Winchester decides to hide Sam away.

Two decades later, Dean Winchester is a hardened hunter, alone in the world, chasing down a nest of vampires. When the hunt goes wrong, he's forced to take an emergency responder as a hostage and leave the city in a hurry. Except his hostage is too pretty for comfort, Dean is badly hurt, and trouble seems to follow them both at every turn. Deeply tangled into a trap that had been set decades ago, they find that nothing can break them as easily as they can break each other.

## Notes:

Translation into Русский available: Все Дороги Ведут К Тебе by flashgun

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## Chapter Management

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[Chapter 1: Prologue](#)

## Chapter Text

Dean was asleep in the back seat. Exhausted. It had been a hell of a night for all of them and the kid had held up well. He would be fearless one day, a hunter to make the devil tremble. John knew this in his heart, his older son was something special. But he was still a kid and John was glad he was asleep. Because this will be so much easier if Dean knew nothing until it was long over.

The sunrise was about an hour away. He didn't know where they would head from here. A hotel probably, at least until the insurance money came in. It would be decent chunk; Mary had handled all that. Home insurance, car insurance, bills, mortgage. It had been her home, her nest, and John had spent these last years continuously awed that she'd chosen to share it with him. His home had always been anywhere he could rest his head, the sky had always been the only blanket he'd needed. Until Mary. Before he knew, before he could fully understand all the things that had made her magic, she'd already become his home.

Lord knew, he'd always had a stubborn streak and wandering feet. He'd been no prince on the white horse when they'd met; he was made with hard edges like his father, like the generations of Winchester men before him. But she'd seen something in him that was worth loving. In her eyes, he'd seen himself as a good man. He never would again.

And Sam, Sam had his mother's eyes. He would grow up to be beautiful like her, with all of her heart and none of John's bad luck. One Winchester at least, would live a normal life after this.

The back door of the Impala creaked slightly and John froze with his hand on the handle. Dean didn't budge though, and after a moment of watching them sleep, nestled against each other like puppies, he gathered Sam up.

Fall leaves crunched under his boots. He kept stealing little glances at Sam's face, memorizing each line, the sweep of his lashes across his cheeks, the small nose already distinctly regal like Mary's had been, the tiny fingers gripping the blanket. He told himself he wouldn't cry again. He'd done enough crying tonight. Maybe in some other life, he would get to see the man his son would become.

Bobby had seen him coming. The door was open before John's foot landed on the porch, his old friend standing at the entrance, solid as an oak. Neither one of them said a word. It was so fast, a blink of an eye. Then Bobby was cradling Sammy in his arms and John felt curiously empty and cold, as if he'd lost Mary all over again. For a moment, he rebelled at it, the injustice of losing two things he cared about so deeply in one night.

"Bobby..."

He swallowed heavily, doubting himself. It wasn't fair.

"He... he'll be hungry when he wakes up."

Bobby's eyes shone but his voice was steady,

"Well then, I guess me and Sammy best hit the road now."

John gave a jerky nod, then he was turning away, leaving, practically running back to the car. It was the right thing to do. The only thing to do. His life, Dean's life, those might be things he could gamble on. But Mary's baby, the son she died protecting, the boy that would one day have her smile... John would save him. No matter what.

He slammed the door too hard. Dean jerked awake in the back seat, sitting up as John turned the Impala around, the gravel flying.

"Dad? Where's Sam?"

A glance in the review mirror showed him Bobby's truck already running, the lights pointing south, in the opposite direction. He didn't know where. Bobby wouldn't say and John didn't want to know. If he didn't know, no one could take it from him.

"Sam! Where is Sam?"

Dean's voice was rising, the pitch changing. Soon he would be crying. He would hate him for a long time after this. He would ask for Sam every day, each time cutting John a little deeper, until

there was nothing there but scar tissue, until he was numb. And that was the price he will gladly pay to keep at least one of Mary's sons safe.

## Chapter Management

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Chapter 2: Death Walks

## Chapter Text

The whiskey tasted like silk. His throat was sore again. It had been hurting on and off for weeks now. He'd been coughing too, a deep painful rattle that was becoming annoying. Most of the time he was too busy to notice. Once in a while he wondered if he should stop at some pharmacy and grab something, but then shit would get in the way. Like right now.

The bar was pretty crowded but Dean had a nice two foot ring of space around his stool that no one ever crossed. No matter which sort of a filthy, seedy place he decided to visit, no one ever bothered him. He couldn't see himself so he didn't know what they saw. A dangerous man whose nose had been broken more than once, whose scars were clearly visible. Muscles obvious even under the leather jacket he wore, gun calluses on his hands, old blood crusted on his boots. Permanent bruises etched under his eyes. Sleep had never been his friend. He slept only when he had to, an hour in the Impala, a couple of hours in a seedy hotel, a few minutes leaning against the wall in an alley, always with one eye open, always with his hand on the gun, ready for anything. He looked like a man who had nothing to lose.

He looked as relaxed as such a man can be. But he could see everything, hear everything. He knew the face of everyone in the bar, had them etched into his brain. He didn't have to look behind him to know that the three guys at the table under the window were armed. Harmless in Dean's book, but still armed. He didn't have to turn around to know that the little waitress just got her ass pinched, even though she said nothing. He could hear the shot glasses sliding against the table in the corner, he could hear the guy at the end of the bar tuck his hand inside his pocket, reaching for his wallet. He could feel people passing behind him, the air moving the hairs on his neck. He knew when the door opened that it was just the couple that had come in half an hour ago, finally deciding that this wasn't their scene. He knew that out of everyone in the bar, six men altogether were armed, two of them actually knew how to use their weapons, and one of them was a thief. He knew that the waitress was not married and had a child, that the owner sold coke on the side, that the bartender had a shotgun hidden under the bar. He knew this despite not having spoken more than two words the entire time, to order his whiskey and tell the bartender to keep them coming. It was his job to know.

So when the door opened again, cool air brushing across the side of his face, he knew who it was without looking. He heard the scrape of boot heel on the floor and could almost smell the old blood wafting from the trench coat. He drank his whiskey. Motioned for another one. Yet, his

heart beat had doubled, the blood in his veins was thrumming, his fingers had started to tingle. He would love to tune out everything else and focus on the scrape of that boot, follow the scent across the bar. But he couldn't. There are a million obstacles, a million possible casualties. He needed to watch, hear and sense every one of them.

The scrape stopped. There was a rush of movement Dean could see out of the corner of his eye, then the bar door was swinging shut.

"Fuck," he groaned.

He moved so fast that the stool tipped and crashed to the floor. The entire bar froze, everyone holding their breath at once. He didn't notice them any more; they'd become unimportant. His pray was escaping.

A cool drizzle made his boots squeak on the pavement. His legs were tired and the rattling cough was threatening again, at the worst possible time. He would have to stop somewhere and grab a handful of pills. As soon as the job is over.

He could see the trench coat duck into an alley and couldn't help but smile. It was a dead end. He knew this, he'd learned this part of the city by heart, he could draw a map of it in his sleep. His guns were already out, just as a precaution. The guns would do nothing but slow his pray down, but a few seconds is all Dean needed. He stopped at the mouth of an alley and entered it at a calmer pace, his ears straining to hear every drop of rain hitting the ground, every whisper of air sliding against the brick. He didn't hear the footsteps but he felt them creeping up behind him. Stepping sideways so he could see the end and the entrance, he finally understood that he was the pray here.

And it was so funny, he couldn't help but chuckle. Drawn out and cornered. He'd missed something somewhere, whether it's because he'd been sleeping so poorly or maybe he was more sick than he'd realized, but the end result was the same. It was entirely possible that tonight would be the night he finally died.

The thought brought a faint sense of relief.

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"Crazy old bat."

"Dude, that's a little harsh."

The neighbors weren't even bothering to peek outside any more, they probably slept right through the sound of the siren and the flashing blue and red lights reflecting in their windows. Seth didn't blame them. He would have loved to catch a half an hour nap instead of driving all the way out to Whitesboro for nothing. And the fact is, he'd been thinking something similar to 'crazy old bat' himself before Mike spoke up. But he would have never said it out loud.

Mike threw the bag back inside the ambulance and rubbed his neck,  
“That was the fourth time this month. Excuse me for getting a little sick of the shit.”  
Seth shrugged, feeling the muscles in his own neck twitching. It’s been weeks since he’d slept more than four hours at a time and rarely ever in an actual bed. He was starting to feel the strain.  
“Listen, she’s an old lady living alone who’s terrified of dying. Put yourself in her shoes.”  
“If I was in her shoes I’d stay away from burritos.”

The inside of the ambulance stank like sweat and sanitizer. The radio crackled as they strapped the seat belts on and Seth leaned against the door, pressing his forehead on the glass. Mike checked in then paused with his hands on the steering wheel,  
“You know, if we leave the lights flashing we can gun it back. Might be able to catch a nap before the next call comes in.”  
“Funny. Why not turn the siren on too? We can run some poor people off the road for a ten minute nap.”  
“That’s sounds great.”  
Seth gave him a look and Mike rolled his eyes,  
“Hello? I was kidding. No need to turn on the bitch face.”  
He shut the lights off and pulled out of the driveway,  
“Besides, I’m not the one who looks like death walking. When was the last time you slept?”  
“Yesterday.”  
“Yeah, ok, and I’m Mary the Queen of Scots.”  
Seth grinned,  
“Well, you are a queen.”  
The radio blared,  
“10-52, we got multiple victims at 2048 Oriskany Boulevard, possible 10-32, proceed with caution.”  
Mike smacked the lights back on,  
“Fucking great. Tell me again why I didn’t move to some small town in West Virginia when I had a chance to?”  
Seth snatched the radio,  
“Cause you’d die from boredom? Unit 12, 10-76.”  
His exhaustion took the back seat as always, his blood started pumping faster, his heart beat picked up the pace.  
He grinned,  
“No nap time for you.”

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One police vehicle was already on the scene but Seth barely even noticed it. This; he could do this on auto pilot, he could do it with one hand tied behind his back. But he didn’t; he never

checked out, no even for a moment. No matter how bad the scene was, no matter how pitiful the victims were.

He assessed the scene in moments. Five bodies, four in a loose ring around the fifth. Two guns on the ground, and far against the alley wall, a glint of steel. A knife; not a little pocket blade either but something massive. Possibly serrated. He couldn't tell and it didn't matter. That was the job for the cops. What mattered was that the four of the victims were code black. There was no need to check. All four had been beheaded.

Another ambulance sounded in the distance and Seth felt a moment of pity for those who'd been trying to catch a little shut eye when the call came in. They didn't need another ambulance. What they needed was a coroner. He stepped over a body to get to the man in the middle who was the only one with his head still attached to his shoulders when he finally noticed the cop. Standing outside the circle of bodies with his gun drawn, his face pale.

"The back up is on the way," he said, sounding more like he was trying to convince himself. Seth had never seen him before but that wasn't uncommon in the city this size. He looked fresh out of the academy and still wet behind his ears. Couple of years behind the wheel of a cop car would age him quickly.

"For one guy who might be dead?" Mike snorted, already on his knees next to the victim and starting the initial assessment.

The cop grinned, a humorless smile that looked ghostly on his pale face, still gripping his gun as if his life depended on it,

"One guy? That's not just one guy. That's Dean Winchester, from the FBI's most wanted list." Faint awe tinged his voice,

"Every cop in the city has had his picture for the last four years."

"Great," Seth said, listening with half an ear.

He was already recording the details. Victim unconscious. Airway unobstructed, the respirations even but slightly wheezy. No drastic chest injury to account for the wheeze, ribs and breast cage intact. Pulse in the mid eighties. Minor head injury, pupils responsive. Trachea, jugular veins, cervical spine, all intact. Multiple lacerations on chest and abdomen. Lacerations on upper left extremity. So much blood.

"Crackles in lower left lobe," Mike reported calmly, then huffed, "Are you telling me this guy beheaded four people with walking pneumonia?"

Multiple lights swept over them and Seth groaned. This was gonna turn into a circus.

"Bp's 90/60, temp 99.2. Let's strap him in," Mike muttered, dropping his cuff back in the bag.

Seth was the one who carefully strapped the neck brace on and slipped the oxygen mask over the bloody face. Strong jaw. A small dimple in the chin. He had one of those too, his mother used to say that dimple could be blamed for fifty percent of swooning girls back in his old high school. FBI's most wanted with eyelashes as long as girl's. Almost pretty, for the lack of a better word.

"Hey there princess," Mike snapped, "asleep on your feet? Let get him on the stretcher."

They'd just managed to slide the stretcher into the ambulance when a cop badge appeared less than a foot away from Seth's face. He fucking hated when they did that. He fought the urge to smack it out of the way.

"Gentlemen, my name is officer O'Malley, I will be riding with you."

"As long as you stay out of the way I don't care if you dance polka in a hula skirt."

Mike covered up a laugh with an unconvincing cough. By the time he'd climbed back into the drivers seat, his face was composed, but Seth knew the asshole would tell everyone how Seth mouthed off to a cop. Chances are, by tomorrow morning, he'd have another visit scheduled with his immediate supervisor.

The cop ignored him, settling into a corner of the ambulance, his gun drawn and resting across his knee.

"... male in mid-twenties, scalp laceration, multiple lacerations to upper extremities, respiratory distress..." Mike rattled off in the background.

Seth wanted to snap that possible pneumonia and chest crackles could hardly be considered respiratory distress but instead, he found himself snapping at the cop,

"I thought you guys weren't supposed to draw your guns unless you're planning on using them."

"Precaution," O'Malley said coolly, looking anywhere but at Seth, "trust me, if that man wakes up, you'll be glad I had my hand on the gun."

"I won't be glad if we hit a bump and you shoot yourself in the foot."

He'd hit a nerve. He could tell by the slight tightening of the guy's mouth, the pulse in his jaw. He didn't care. For some reason he'd always disliked cops, even though his interaction with the law over the years had been minimal.

"Just do your job," O'Malley said, "and let me do mine."

## Chapter Management

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Chapter 3: In which O'Malley takes a nap

## Chapter Text

Thirty seconds. That was all he needed.

In thirty seconds he knew he wasn't seriously injured, that there was an oxygen mask over his face and a needle in his arm, blood pressure cuff on the other arm and an oximeter on his finger. He was strapped in but he could feel the places where the belt was clipped, right in the middle of his chest. It would take him about ten seconds to free himself from it. The urge to do so immediately was overwhelming. He didn't like being restricted; his first instinct was to free himself no matter the consequences.

He fought it. Took another thirty seconds to assess the situation.

Ambulance, moving, siren sounding, lights flashing. He didn't need to see to know that there were three men, a driver, and two in the back with him. Protocol called for two. If the third was a trainee he would be hovering somewhere near instead of breathing calmly in the corner. So a cop. And if there was a cop in the ambulance, then there was probably a cop car following it to the hospital.

That meant two things. They knew who he was. And there was a weapon handy.

In four seconds he had the belt unclipped and was moving. The needle came out of his arm, the tape taking some skin with it. The fucking cuff was attached to the wall. He'd planned to grab the weapon first but now his momentum was off, the cop's finger was already on the trigger, the driver was shouting something. Another few seconds and they would swerve, the cop car following them would notice, it would all go to shit. In the space of time it took for the cuff to tighten around his arm and the velcro to start ripping loudly, he'd recalculated. Shifted his weight. His foot connected with the cop's wrist and the gun went flying. The cuff finally let go and he was free. The ambulance swerved and the cop stumbled. Dean used the momentum to grab the back of his neck and slam his face on the edge of the stretcher. The crack of his skull seemed incredibly loud even with the siren and the radio static. He went for the gun.

One moment his fingers were brushing against it and in the next, he was in the corner of the ambulance, his ear ringing. The surprise overwhelmed the pain. Maybe he shouldn't have assumed that he was the only one in the ambulance with fast reflexes. Although, he would have put his money on the cop rather than the long haired youth who now gripped the gun above him.

He looked steady and confident, the barrel pointing at Dean's head, more precisely, right in between his eyes.

Yet, when he spoke, his voice betrayed him.

"Mike, pull over!"

It squeaked. His voice actually squeaked. Dean wanted to laugh.

"Mike," Dean yelled, "you pull this ambulance over and your friend here is dead meat."

The kid's eyes widened and he slid back and away from Dean carefully, only a half a foot but far enough to be out of reach. His eyes were green. Something about them seemed vaguely familiar. Dean shifted slightly, two fingers sliding over the ripped cuff next to him. The gauge was cracked but still attached. Not his preferred weapon of choice but any port in a storm.

"Mike!! Pull over!!"

Mike sounded older but no less panicked,



“Seth? Does he have a weapon? I can’t see him!”

The radio kept blaring. The cops following them were probably starting to panic now since no one was checking in.

Dean grinned up at the boy, his hand tightening around the cuff, “Anyone ever tell you you’re too pretty for that uniform?”

That’s where things almost went from bad to worse. Because the kid fucking blushed. Even though he was half hidden by all that hair, Dean noticed the color creeping up his cheeks. It was that split second that made him change his aim. He didn’t wanna mark up this kid or hurt him. It seemed a crime to leave bruises on that face now, when he’d seen it blush. Maybe he was getting soft. Or it was just the fact that he hadn’t gotten laid in a while. Or that he’d always been a sucker for a pretty face. Either way, he swung out at the kid’s wrists instead. And missed. The rubber hose and the weight of the gauge itself were the only things that saved the day. Even so, the kid managed to squeeze the trigger. A shot echoed. Dean felt the bullet fly past his forehead, heard it punch the metal behind him. Then he had the kid’s wrists in both of his, he was spinning him around, tangling his feet, bringing him down to his knees. The wonderful, hundred and one uses pressure cuff was still in one piece. He tightened the rubber hose around the kid’s wrists so he could hold them with one hand. With the other he finally had a grip on the gun. It was a pussy little thing for a cop gun, but beggars can’t be choosers. He pressed the barrel against the kid’s neck and felt him grow still, every muscle tightening.

“Ok, you’re gonna tell your friend to check back in with the cops. To tell them everything is fine.”  
“Fuck you.”

Dean chuckled and yanked on the cuff, bending him backwards until his shoulders were leaning against Dean’s chest. He could feel him quivering and he would bet his life that it wasn’t from fear. No, the kid was fucking furious. A wildcat. The sort Dean would have loved to meet in a bar somewhere on a good night.

“Seth??” Mike sounded ready to jump out of his skin.

“I only need one hostage,” Dean said, “and I bet you could drive this thing as well as he can. Tell him to check back in with the cops or we’re gonna take a nice little walk over there and I’m gonna put a bullet in the back of his skull.”

The kid jerked and Dean pressed the barrel down harder. There would be a bruise on his neck later. Dean imagined it wouldn’t look much different from your everyday hickey.

“The cops won’t believe a fucking word of it.”  
“Never mind what cops believe. Just tell him to do it.”

For a few long unbearable seconds Dean thought he would have to rethink this whole plan.

Then the kid yelled out his instructions, word for word. To his credit, Mike didn't ask a lot of stupid questions. Dean heard him call it in. No one sane listening to the tone of his voice would believe that everything was fine. The cops knew. They knew from the moment the ambulance swerved the first time. They had to know unless they were all brain dead back there. But now they also knew that he had both hostages under his control.

"Seth? Your name is Seth?"

The kid didn't answer. His back trembled from being stuck in an uncomfortable position, the back of his head a few inches away from Dean's face. Dean could smell his hair, something green and crisp. Lemon grass? Underneath it though, there was a faint hint of soap. Irish Spring. He was smelling the kid's skin.

"I don't wanna hurt you," Dean went on, "I don't wanna hurt your buddy there."

"You killed a cop," the kid hissed.

Dean glanced over to the cop sprawled in the corner of the ambulance. He couldn't tell if the guy was alive or dead.

"Collateral damage," he said, "I don't think he's dead though."

"You cracked his skull," Seth spat out, sounding furious, "at least let me go check on him."

"No. Sorry. He'll live or he won't."

"Seth?? Seth, the cops wanna talk to O'Malley."

Mike was starting to sound hysterical.

"O'Malley is taking a nap," Dean said loudly, "tell them that. And tell them to stop bothering you."

"Now Seth, which hospital are you taking me to?"

Seth was breathing heavily now, the arch of his back probably making it hard on his lungs to do their job. Dean let him straighten up a few inches. He actually felt some pity for the kid.

Technically, they were both in the same line of business except that Dean killed things. Minor difference. Also, his chest still felt tight and congested. Maybe he'd get a chance to sift through their supplies. He had no time for a fucking chest cold.

"Which hospital?" he repeated, tugging on his wrists.

"St. Elizabeth's."

"Excellent."

He considered getting up to move closer to the driver, but Seth had some long legs on him and there was no way in hell Dean would let them unfold and risk the kid knowing some kung fu moves. His ear was still ringing from that first punch.

“Hey Mikey-boy! How’ya doing there?”

“Seth?” the guy croaked.

How did this guy even do the job? One armed psycho in the back of the ambulance and Mikey-boy was having a nervous breakdown. Dean was embarrassed for him.

“Seth is right here, he’s fine. Tell him you’re fine Seth.”

“I’m fine,” Seth ground out.

The kid was still pissed. Not an ounce of fear in him. Sweet Jesus, but he would have been so much fun under any other circumstances. Dean would have taken his time charming this one. This was the type of guy that would have probably kept him in the same town for weeks. And it would have been so worth it.

“See? He’s fine. Now there’s a road before you get to the hospital, one of those dead end residential ones. Hammond Road. You’re gonna turn in there. Don’t go turning your blinker on or anything stupid cause I’ll have to shoot you, k? Just take a sharp turn when you get there and try and get this rust bucket to go faster. Capisce?”

“I don’t-- I don’t know Hammond Road!”

“You don’t have to know it. It’s on the right. When you see it, turn. It’s not brain surgery.”

“Seth?”

“Just fucking do what he says Mike,” Seth snapped, sounding as irritated with him as Dean felt.

Dean chuckled again.

“It’s not fucking funny”.

“Sure it is kid. You ought to lighten up a bit.”

Seth practically vibrated, “They’re gonna kill you and we’re gonna get caught in crossfire.”

“Nah,” Dean leaned closer to his ear, “they might kill me but you’re gonna be fine. Or is it me you’re really worried about?”

He was so close to the kid’s neck now that he could stick out his tongue and taste it. Suddenly that seemed like a really good idea. And a really horrible idea.

Seth must’ve felt Dean’s breath on his neck because he shuddered and damn it all to hell if that wasn’t just the hottest goddamned thing. Dean would have filthy dreams for a month just from these few minutes in an ambulance. And that was fucking funny. In a depressing sort of way.

“I hope they kill you,” he said softly.

“Swell,” Dean said, pulling him back again so Seth’s shoulders pressed against him, the kid’s wrists practically in his crotch, and maybe that wasn’t the best move, but too late now.

Seth tried to jerk away and Dean dug the barrel into his throat again.

“Just stay put huh? That turn is coming up. Wouldn’t wanna disturb my trigger finger.”

When the turn came Mike did an excellent job. The damn ambulance almost tipped on two wheels. Of course, he ruined a perfect move by a very undignified squeak as everything in the ambulance that wasn’t attached slid over and smacked against the left wall. Then they were speeding down the road, the siren and the lights still on. Somewhere behind them came a sound of screeching tires and a satisfying metal crunch. That was a stroke of luck. Dean hadn’t dared count on it but now he could add another minute or so to his time limit.

“Mikey-boy! Get them fucking lights off. And the siren. When you see the end of the road, I want you to turn this thing around. I want it facing the way we came.”

“What? I-- I can’t, the road’s too narrow!”

“Sure you can. You’ve got skills, you’ll be fine. I’ve still got a gun to your friend’s head so keep that in mind too.”

He shifted slightly. He was bleeding again, or probably had been since he’d hopped off a stretcher like a jack in a box. But now he could feel it trickling down his stomach and his back. And he wanted to fucking cough again. What a fuck up of a night. There would be no time to sift through the ambulance for bandages or pills. He felt crappy enough to actually wanna see a doctor. Except that now, he’d have to book it out of town in record time.

Seth tried to jerk away again and Dean absently twisted the rubber around his wrists. The kid growled and Dean fought the urge to pat him on the head. That’s when it occurred to him that he had the closest thing to a doctor right here in the ambulance. He’d never taken a hostage before but there’s a first time for everything, right? Besides, the cops would probably be more cautious about spraying everything with bullets if they knew that Dean was using an all American boy as a shield. Right. That was actually a pretty good idea. A hostage. For protection and the know-how. Not because he was pretty. Not because Dean still wanted to lick him. Because he needed someone to sow him up later.

Then Mike was making a u-turn in a space barely large enough to turn a cart, Dean was pulling the kid to his feet and the party was about to start.

Chapter Management

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Chapter 4: You're in a car with a lunatic

Chapter Text

"Are you fucking serious right now?"

"Just keep moving sunshine."

"They're gonna figure it out in three seconds."

"It's been ten minutes and I don't hear anyone coming."

Seth's sneaker sunk into something soft; a thick stench of rotting fruit assaulted his nostrils. The barrel of the gun nudged his spine and he ground his teeth. He'd already slid once, ending up on his ass in an inch of disgusting, slimy fluid that had immediately found its way through his uniform and stuck to his skin. Dean had yanked him back to his feet by the collar of his shirt, like he was some sort of a fucking dog. Then asked him if he was hurt which Seth didn't dignify with a response.

He was exhausted, it was dark, it smelled like what it was, the fucking sewers, he was crawling around in the fucking sewers with a crazy guy, and he might be dead by sunrise.

"I should've stayed in bed last night."

"Ah, but then we never would've met."

"You're psychotic."

"That's possible, but it doesn't change the fact that I've got the gun so move them sweet cheeks faster."

"I can't fucking see!"

"You don't need to see. I know where we're going."

He should have shot him. He had the gun on the fucker in the ambulance, cocked and ready to fire. Seth was a good shot, always has been. It was the guy's fucking eyes, his fucking smirk. He was good looking when he was unconscious but Seth wasn't prepared to have that face animated, didn't expect that raspy voice to call him pretty. The motherfucker had known exactly what he was doing too, Seth would bet his life on it. You don't walk around with that face all your life without knowing the effect it has on people.

A hand landed on his shoulder,

"Stop. Right here."

Seth shook him off,

"Here what?"

"Reach to your right, you'll feel it."

There were rungs leading up that Seth couldn't fucking see at all. What was it with this fucking guy? Was he part cat?

He started climbing slowly, reconsidering his options. He would have maybe two seconds at most once he was up top. He would really like to finish the job that the cops had started and get this nutcase behind bars. But to be realistic, his best option would be trying to run for it and hoping he doesn't end up with a bullet in his back. A hand grabbed his ankle and he flinched.

"The cover. It's right above you."

Seth put his hand up and felt the rough surface less than two inches below his head. Another step up and he would have whacked his head on it, and wouldn't that have been just a perfect conclusion to the worst night of his life?

He moved it aside carefully and a weak street light pored in. The hand on his ankle tightened.

"You try and run, I will shoot you. I'll regret it, but I won't hesitate."

Seth felt his fingers turn numb. There was no trace of mocking humor in that sentence. There was no trace of that smirking lunatic from earlier. That was the cool, emotionless voice of someone who had beheaded four men.

For the first time, Seth felt a cold finger of fear creeping up his spine.

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"You're gonna drive. You do something stupid in my car, I won't kill you. I'll put as many bullets in you as I can, without actually killing you. It'll hurt."

Hell, Seth could almost understand that. He wasn't an expert in cars by a long shot but he would bet his life that was a 1967 Chevy Impala, chrome practically glowing under the street lamps. He'd never actually seen one, let alone driven one. On any other day, he would've gladly traded his Explorer just for a chance to take a '67 Impala for a spin. This one looked like it had been over some rough terrain recently, but underneath it, he could see that it had been well cared for, that someone had pampered it and babied it.

A guy who beheaded four men and pampered the crap out of his car.

"Who'd you steal it from?" Seth asked.

"I didn't steal it," the nutcase said, actually sounding offended, "It was my dad's. Now it's mine."

"Does your dad know you go around murdering people? Or is that something you got from him too?"

His head bounced off the building wall with so much force that lights exploded in front of his eyes. A thumb dug into his throat, almost lifting him off the ground, and he felt the barrel dig into

his solar plexus, the pressure pushing out that little bit of oxygen he'd managed to keep in his lungs.

"You don't know shit about my dad, ok? Don't talk about him like that."

The guy fucking radiated heat. He was like a furnace about to blow, his breath seared Seth's face. He was so close now that Seth could see the dusting of freckles across his nose and cheekbones, could see the edge of gold surrounding the green of his irises. He smelled like oil and leather and metal. Blazing hot metal, just pulled out of the fire, still glowing with flames. Seth couldn't breathe, he couldn't move, his vision was starting to swim, the back of his head pounded sickly, he was afraid.

He was afraid and he was growing hard at the same time. The combination made him want to vomit.

"Air," he gasped.

Dean released him and stepped back. Seth inhaled desperately, the air burning his throat and lungs.

"Get in the car."

--

He put together and discarded a million different plans. Slam on the breaks and take his chances. Try and grab the gun while the car is still moving. Drive them both off a fucking cliff. He wavered between fury and despair. His head was pounding. He was filthy and sore and his throat hurt. Going on thirty-two hours with no sleep. His eyes kept watering, his hands were starting to shake, and on top of it all, he was hungry. He wanted coffee. He wanted a disgusting egg and bacon sandwich. He wanted to be anywhere else in the world.

He chuckled humorlessly at the sheer ridiculousness of the situation.

"What's funny?" Dean asked.

He was bleeding in the passenger seat, looking just as exhausted as Seth felt. But his hand never wavered and the gun was still pointed at Seth.

"Had I known I was gonna get kidnapped I would've gotten more sleep last night."

Dean huffed,

"Had I known I was gonna get the shit beat out of me I would've gotten more sleep too. We're almost there though."

Seth wanted to quip that Dean was still doing better than the four guys whose heads were not attached to their torsos any more, but bit his tongue at the last second. The exhaustion and the lack of sleep were making his mouth looser than it usually is. If Dean was truly as tired as he looked, maybe he would just pass out. Seth had expected him to pass out from blood loss alone quite a few hours ago. The car stank like blood. Dean's shirt had been gray; now it was almost black. He would have to peel it off.

"Right there. The dirt road."

--

Seth parked and blinked at the white ranch. It looked like a painting. Clean and white and pretty, flanked by two oaks. Wide wrap around porch and curtains in the windows. No other houses in sight. Just fields of green ending at the forest line. Barely two hours out of the city and a completely different world. Maybe he was dreaming. Maybe he would wake up any moment now, cramped and miserable for having fallen asleep in the ambulance. Maybe none of this was real.

His first response bag slammed against his crotch and he hissed.

"C'mon sunshine, you and the bag, let's go."

He got out of the car slowly, every muscle protesting loudly, practically screaming at him. Dean motioned with the gun and Seth shouldered the bag. The air smelled clean here, almost too clean after the copper scent of the car.

"Whose house is this?"

Dean shrugged and winced,  
"Who cares? They're not here."

"What if they come back?"

"They won't."

"Did you kill them too?"

"I didn't fucking kill anyone," Dean snapped, his voice strained,  
"Move."

"There are four headless guys back at the morgue that beg to differ."

"I swear to God, if you don't get moving right now..."

Seth shut his mouth and stumbled up the path to the house.

Chapter Management



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## Chapter 5: Eight jars of cremated cats

### Chapter Text

They set up in the kitchen. Spotless, all white appliances and oak furniture, lace curtains. Straight out of the Better Homes and Gardens. Shiny wood floors. Some sort of a plant flourishing on the windowsill. Unreal.

Dean put the gun on the kitchen table. For some reason, it looked even more menacing on top of the flower embroidered tablecloth. He shrugged out of his jacket, dropped it on the floor, then peeled the bloody tee shirt off. Suddenly, Seth's tongue became too large for his mouth. He looked away. Focused on the tablecloth pattern. Felt an incredible urge to clear his throat. To fidget. To run like hell.

"Well? I didn't bring you along for snarky remarks."

Seth looked up then back down. Tried like hell to work some fucking moisture in his mouth. This was stupid. He'd seen plenty of half-naked men in his lifetime. At least a dozen on daily basis. The locker room at shift change was a veritable Chippendales catalog, complete with uniforms, hidden tattoos and various extras. So, the psycho guy was... hot. So what?

"I'll need--" he croaked, blushed, cleared his throat.  
Wanted to kick himself.

"I'll need a towel or something. To wash all that off. So I can see what I'm working with."

"Use the kitchen towel."

It was a relief, turning his back on the... the pile of skin and muscle and crazy. He was tired. That was all. Exhausted, lightheaded, giddy. He felt like he was sleepwalking. He ran the water for a while, waiting for it to turn warm. Studied the silly green plant on the windowsill, trying to figure out what the thing was supposed to be. Is it supposed to flower? It didn't look like anything Seth had seen. It sort of looked like a weed. Something in his head clicked.

"Who waters the plant?"

"What?"

"The plant. Someone waters the plant."

There was a short silence behind him and Seth fought the urge to turn around.

"I watered the plant."

Seth had already stuck the towel under the stream of water. For a few seconds he was sure that he misunderstood. Then he turned on his heel, the water off the towel splashing across the floor.

"You watered the plant?"

Dean was sitting down, one hand loosely on the gun, leaving streaks of blood on the spotless tablecloth. His eyebrows climbed up, giving away genuine confusion.

"Yeah. I watered the plant."

"You watered the plant. So it wouldn't die?"

Dean cocked his head, looking at Seth as if Seth was the crazy one here.

"Yeah. That's the general idea behind watering plants."

"You watered the plant so it wouldn't die but you killed four fucking men, cracked a cop's head and threatened to fill me up with bullets."

"I didn't--" he paused, rubbing his hand across his mouth.

The circles under his eyes had grown enormous in the last few hours, giving him a haunted look. He was pale. Really pale. Seth couldn't tell if it was from blood loss or exhaustion.

"Yeah, whatever. I'm crazy as a squirrel. Just get on with it before I bleed to death."

--

Blood up to his wrists, under his nails, stuck in the folds of his knuckles. His hands were shaking like crazy. Which made the stitches nearly impossible. He swore and grunted through the ordeal, making more noise than Dean who was the one being repeatedly stuck with a needle. They were turning out to be the most unsightly stitches Seth had ever done; his old instructor would have sat down and cried. By the time he was done patching up the worst of it, he felt winded, as if he'd ran uphill the whole time.

Dean's skin was hot to the touch. Slick with the blood. Even the slight movement caused a chain effect of muscle movement, large ones folding like waves, the smaller ones jumping under Seth's hands, unnerving the crap out of him. All he could smell was blood and metal. His mouth either had too much moisture in it or not enough. He caught himself marveling at the flawless ridge of the spine more than once, literally zoning out while sticking a needle into the flesh. He exhaled heavily after cutting off the last thread and watched a shudder race up Dean's spine.

“Is it done?”

Despite bearing it all in silence, Dean’s voice didn’t sound too steady.

Seth had no right to talk though, his voice came out as a squeak,  
“Yeah. No, I gotta bandage you up.”

Thankfully, that went easier. And faster. Every inch of the gauze covered more skin and that’s really what Seth wanted, to cover all that skin up so he didn’t have to look at it. His fingers and wrists were starting to cramp. He’d put so much effort into stopping his hands from shaking that he probably wouldn’t be able to pick up a cup of coffee. Jesus, he would love some coffee. And a sandwich. And to not be here.

“Done,” he said.

“Good. Sit. You look like you’re gonna fall over.”

Seth couldn’t even muster up enough energy for a snarky remark. He settled across the table from Dean, leaving red palm prints on the cloth. He should really wash his hands now, but that would require standing up again. And he was so fucking tired. He just wanted to put his head down on the hard surface in front of him and sleep for a year.

Dean rolled his shoulders as if taking them for a test drive, the gauze tightening around the muscles. Seth closed his eyes. There was no such thing as a healthy blend of fear, exhaustion and arousal. There just wasn’t. There was such a thing as a sensory input overload and Seth was pretty sure that he’d just hit the mark.

“How’s your head?”

Seth heard the scrape of the chair and refused to open his eyes. Maybe he could just keep them closed from now on. Best get used to the dark. The only path out of this fucking situation was in a body bag anyway.

He wanted to say his head was fine, instead he heard himself tell Dean the truth,  
“It hurts.”

When fingers touched the back of his head he nearly jumped out of the chair.

“Easy,” Dean said, sounding like he was soothing a wild horse,  
“Relax. I just wanna make sure I didn’t crack your skull.”

His hands were surprisingly gentle, parting the hair, feeling the back of Seth's skull. Seth felt every single hair on the back of his head stand up at the touch, felt a slow tingle lazily make its way down his spine.

"You're not bleeding. You're gonna have a hell of a lump back there though."

"Great," Seth grumbled, but it came out breathless and weird, someone else's voice, so he clamped his mouth shut.

"What about your throat?"

And before Seth could process the question, Dean's hand was tracing a path over the bruises, the one from the gun, the one from Dean's thumb, and Jesus, the kitchen was suddenly pit of hell hot, Seth was sweating, his mouth was filling with saliva. He was either going to freak out or he was going to throw up. The difference seemed minimal really. He swallowed, his adam's apple brushing Dean's fingers. Somewhere behind him, Dean exhaled heavily.

Then the hand was gone. Seth shivered. His neck suddenly felt cold without it there.

"Are you hungry? I'm fucking starving."

Seth heard the fridge door open, heard stuff hitting the counter. Then cabinets opening, pots and pans rattling. Never mind being killed, he was gonna go insane. He'd come across some crazy people in his line of work. There was the guy who'd been furiously jerking off when Seth and Mike had responded to the 911 call from his daughter. He never slowed down, he just kept going at it the entire ambulance ride to the hospital. Then there had been the lady who wouldn't go to the hospital without her cats, because, you know, what if she died while she was there? Seth had patiently explained that they don't let pets into the ambulance. At which point she'd explained that the cats were cremated, she just wanted to bring the eight jars with her. Eight jars of cremated cats. You know, in the case she died. And those weren't even the worst. Seth was sure that he'd seen the worst of the crazy that the humanity had to offer. But this was beyond him.

"I haven't been here in two weeks," Dean said lightly,  
"but I'm pretty sure the eggs are still good."

The eggs were still good. Seth didn't know if he wanted to laugh or cry.

"Are you gonna kill me," he asked tiredly.

The movement behind him stopped,  
"No. I'm not gonna kill you. I told you I don't kill people."

"That's right. I keep forgetting that important detail. Are you gonna let me go?"

The movement continued. The gas stove went on, the pan slid across the grates.

"Yeah. I'll let you go."

"When?"

"Tomorrow."

"Why? Why not right now?"

Oil sizzled. Seth heard him crack an egg on the edge of the counter and dump it into the pan. Then another and another. Five eggs. The smell was just ridiculous. Seth felt as if he hadn't eaten in years. Who knew eggs could smell so fucking good?

"Because I would have to drive you. I'm not letting you leave on foot. You would stop at the first pay phone and bring cops down on me."

The toaster handle clicked.

"I'm not ready for cops to know which direction I'm running in. Not until I'm ready for them to know. When I do let you go I'm gonna need to disappear, and I can't do that right now. So tomorrow. When I'm ready to move on."

Seth didn't believe a word of it.

But what did it matter anyway? He was too tired to care. He was too tired to argue.

"You wanna wash the blood off your hands?"

Seth glanced down and felt nausea climb up his throat. He was still coated in it and it was starting to dry. Who knew what Dean had, what he might be carrying. Stupid. It was stupid to stitch him up with no gloves. But if he was gonna die anyway, what fucking difference did it make?

He got up slowly, turned around and stopped.

The gun was stuck in the back of Dean's pants. Above it, his back was a crosspatch of bandage and bruises and skin. Honey. That was the only color Seth could compare it to. Faint sunlight was drifting in through the kitchen window, spilling over Dean's head and shoulder, turning the tips of his hair gold. Did everyone turn a poet right before they were about to die?

He was flipping the eggs. A crazy guy who beheaded four people and had threatened to find out how many bullets he could put into Seth without actually killing him. Flipping the eggs with a spatula, his shoulders relaxed, his posture almost content. Just your regular killer who knew his way around a pan and eggs. Watered plants. Buttered bread.

He twisted slightly, meeting Seth's eyes,

"You ok there? You gonna pass out?"

Seth numbly made his way to the sink, washed his hands, dried them with a towel. Went back to the chair and sat down. Considered trying to snatch the gun. Considered grabbing the handle of the pan and smashing it in Dean's face. Turned that insane sentence in his head over and over again, like a broken record.

'I didn't kill anyone. I don't kill people.'

A plate slid in front of him, a pile of scrambled eggs with extra pepper on top and two slices of buttered toast. Dean settled across from him.

"Dig in."

Should he rebel? Go on a hunger strike? Throw the plate at his head? Try and stab him with the fork?

His stomach growled loudly and Dean grinned. The motherfucker grinned, his teeth flashing, a small dimple in his cheek appearing only for a second.

"I make the best scrambled eggs this side of Houston."

"Of course you do. You make scrambled eggs and water plants."

Dean tilted his head and damn fucking everything if that wasn't a small line of worry on his forehead.

Seth wanted to scream.

Instead he shook his head, grabbed his fork and scooped up a pile of egg.

He only tasted the first bite. Then he was shoveling food in, barely pausing to breathe.

"Whoa there, ease up there sunshine. I don't do egg vomit."

Seth didn't even hear him.

In less than two minutes his plate was empty, he felt nauseous again and his head suddenly weighed a hundred pounds. He was freezing. His teeth chattered. He wanted to lie down. He would pay to lie down. He would be willing to take a bullet in the back of his head if he could just lie down.

Dean had only finished half his plate but he kept glancing at Seth with that expression on his face that Seth was learning to recognize by now, the expression that suggested, yet again, that Seth was the crazy one here.

"What did you put in the eggs?" Seth asked, his eyelids drifting down on their own.

“Um, cream? Pepper? You look like shit. Are you gonna barf? Cause that’ll really put a damper on my appetite.”

“I think I’m gonna pass out.”

“Oh no,” the chair scraped, “You’re not gonna pass out in the damn kitchen. You’re too fucking tall for that shit. Up. On your feet.”

Seth stumbled across the kitchen, Dean’s hand resting lightly on the back of his spine, burning through his shirt. Jesus, he was so cold. Stairs. There were fucking stairs in front of him. They looked as tall as the Mount Everest. He groaned.

“C’mon sunshine, one step at a time. When was the last time you slept?”

His brain poked around, trying to come up with the answer. The stairs tilted slightly and Dean’s hand steadied him, kept him upright. Why couldn’t he just lie down on the stairs? The fucking carpet looked like a cloud of fuzzy warmth.

“Two days ago?”

“Two days ago,” Dean repeated.

Was that disapproval? Out of the crazy guy? Seth stumbled when there were no more stairs and Dean had to steer him down the hall with both hands. Then there was a room. And in the middle of the room a bed. A fucking bed. With a pillow. And a blanket.

Seth couldn’t actually remember his body connecting with its surface before the world just dropped off the radar.

Chapter Management

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Chapter 6: Is crazy contagious?

Chapter Text

Dean took Seth’s sneakers and socks off. For comfort. Then the uniform. Because of the sewer water. Because who in their right mind would wanna sleep in all that filth? His hands didn’t linger anywhere; he wasn’t a pervert, he had morals. But he also had a God given right to ogle so he did. And the kid was fucking gorgeous. From head to toe perfect, like someone had fucking sculpted him. Temper, sharp tongue, strong stomach, one hell of a body. Dean’s type down to a T. And wasn’t just another wonderful joke on the part of the all mighty universe. Someone upstairs must get some serious laughs from fucking with him.

He piled as many blankets on the kid as he could find then went back downstairs. Cleaned up. Checked all the traps and salt lines. Went back to the Impala and loaded his duffle bag with guns. It was past time to do some cleaning. He'd had so little time to do anything lately. The Impala could use a wash too but that would wait until he was out of NY state. Besides, cleaning the guns was a soothing process. There was something about the smell of Hoppe's, the soft scrape of the bronze brush down the barrel that always calmed him down, focused him. And he needed focus now, with that kid upstairs, half naked and sprawled out on the bed.

Seth's fucking hands on his skin, the needle going in and out, his breath on Dean's spine, on his neck, the quiet little mutters. His hair so fucking soft, the skin of his neck warm, smooth, his voice all breathless and rough.

Dean slammed the trunk closed with more force than was necessary and stomped back to the house. This was a stupid idea. Seth thought he was crazy and Dean was starting to have some doubts himself. What the fuck did he think was gonna happen? Some sort of a mutual hormone explosion? Wild bloody sex on the kitchen floor? He could hear Bobby's exasperated voice, reminding him again that real life was not a porn movie.

By the time he got back inside he was winded and the pressure in his chest was back in full force. Fuck. He dug through the first response bag and found nothing but first aid supplies and over the counter bottle of Advil tucked into the far corner. He had a feeling that the Advil wasn't a protocol item but he took the bottle out and swallowed three pills.

He'd planned on setting up at the kitchen table. Everything was already bloody and stained anyway. Instead he found himself going back upstairs. Just to check on the kid, of course. To make sure he wasn't throwing up eggs all over the place. Once he was back in the room though, the mop of Seth's hair barely visible above the pile of blankets, he decided to stay. He'd just set up in the corner and clean his guns there. In the case kid woke up and was disoriented.

Good plan.

Except he spent more time looking at Seth's face than he did cleaning the guns.

Yeah, he'd definitely shot himself in the foot with this one.

--

Seth woke up to the nauseating stench of bathroom cleaner and rotten bananas. His head felt like a balloon. His mouth tasted like ass. His left arm was tucked somewhere underneath him and dead to the world. He groaned.

"Well good morning sunshine."



He flinched and opened his eyes.

Dean was sitting behind the desk across the room, guns laid out on the wood surface, small grin on his face.

"Fuck," Seth said, "I thought it was all a nightmare."

"Sorry."

Yeah, he was sorry. Great.

Seth struggled to sit up in bed and noticed he'd been stripped down to teeshirt and boxers.

"Did you take my clothes off?"

Dean had the decency to look embarrassed,

"You smelled like the sewer."

"I smelled like the sewer? The whole room reeks. It's like you brutally murdered a loaf of banana bread. By drowning it in the toilet!"

Dean chuckled, a deep raspy sound. It smacked Seth right in the middle of his stomach and then twisted it viciously until he wanted to squirm. Holy hell. If that what a chuckle sounded like, what would it be like if the guy full out laughed? No. Seth didn't wanna now. He looked away and focused on the windows. It was pitch black outside, no lights, not even moonlight.

"What time is it?"

"About ten o'clock. You slept fifteen hours. Must've been exhausted."

Seth blushed. He remembered Dean leading him up the stairs, Dean's hand on the base of his spine, on his upper arm, holding him up, steering him down the hallway, then nothing. He couldn't remember actually lying down. He definitely hadn't been conscious for the whole undressing thing. He looked down at his teeshirt and boxers, the full force of it hitting him. Dean had undressed him.

Dean had undressed him.

"You didn't..."

Dean blinked at him then his face hardened,

"Don't flatter yourself sweetheart. You're not my type. And I like my sex consensual."

Now Seth's face was in actual flames. He could feel his fucking neck and torso turning red.

He looked away,  
“I’d like some clothes please.”  
“At the foot of the bed. The jeans might be a little short.”

He dressed quickly and sat back down, his head pounding.

“So tomorrow,” Dean said, his voice decidedly on the cool side now,  
“you should know I’m not bringing you back to the city. There’s no way in hell I’m going anywhere near it now. It’s a random highway gas station for you. They’ll let you use a phone and call the cops.”

“Right,” Seth said, rubbing the back of his neck,  
“You’re gonna drop me off at some gas station so I can call the cops. Then I can just go on with my life.”

Dean tilted his head slightly and Seth decided that he was getting pretty fucking tired of that expression on his face.

“Why don’t we cut the crap, huh? You’re not just gonna ‘let me go.’ Why would I fucking believe it? I’m not the crazy one here. I find you surrounded by headless torsos but you insist that you don’t kill people. And,” he barked a hysterical laugh, “you believe it too! You’re not lying! You honestly believe that you didn’t murder anyone and that’s great, good for you, but when you tell me you’re gonna let me go tomorrow, sorry if I can’t just eat that. Whether you think you’re just gonna let me walk is irrelevant when I’m gonna end up buried under one of those oak trees in the back yard. So quit fucking spewing your delusions my way, ok? Keep them to your fucking self. I’d like the last few hours of my life to be free from bullshit.”

Dean stared at him for a long moment. His head was still tilted and Seth hoped to God that the voices in his head weren’t telling him that he should probably kill Seth now instead of later.

When he unfolded from the chair, he made no sound at all. He grabbed a gun from the table without looking down to see what he was grabbing. Seth felt his heart climb into his throat. Maybe he’d been a little hasty with that rant.

“Um, hey, you know, I didn’t mean--”

Dean shushed him with a hand motion, his head still cocked, his gaze now locked on the room door.

Great. Seth had set off another psychotic episode. Good going Seth. Two years and an associates degree in psych were really paying off here.

Dean turned so quickly that Seth almost yelped. He dropped the gun on the floor and snatched a knife out of his boot. Seth had time for a genuine what the fuck moment then the door

exploded in a shower of splinters. He covered his face out of instinct. An arm grabbed him and tried to yank him off the bed. He thought it was Dean. He looked up and froze. His mind stuttered, some wheels just skipped out on their usual rotation, stuff was running but there was no one home to flip the switches.

Teeth. That was a lot of fucking teeth. He'd watched a documentary on shark teeth once and these looked an awful lot like those. Except that he was not in an ocean. This was a person. A man. Two arms, two legs, head and teeth. A hand clamped around his throat and lifted him off the bed, just kept lifting and lifting, and shit, he could hear the bones in his own neck grinding like chewing popcorn, he was standing on his fucking tip toes now and was still being lifted, and another half an inch and his fucking neck would snap. He kicked out wildly and his leg connected with the guy's groin. The pressure on his neck disappeared and he gasped, trying to swallow air. A disconnected thought streaked through his head, really more of an observation, that there are really only so many times a man can almost die by strangulation in twenty four hours. The teeth guy had bent over his groin and now Seth could see three more, three more fucking guys with those teeth, Dean backed into the corner of the room, his knife flashing, and Seth was going insane. He was definitely already insane. Whatever the fuck Dean has must be catching. A pair of hands bunched in his shirt and then he was fucking flying through the air, slamming against the wall, his head bouncing off of it with a smack. He hit the ground with hands and knees, the impact jarring his spine, his vision swimming. Glass shattered, there was a crack of broken wood, things rolling on the floor, screaming, a gunshot echoed, then another. A hand grabbed a fistful of his hair and yanked his head back and it was the same guy, all those teeth, Seth wasn't fucking dreaming this, it was really fucking happening. And he had no clue what was going on or what the fuck was up with the teeth but he was suddenly fucking furious. He'd been fucking pushed around and yanked and nearly strangled and he'd crawled through sewers and had a gun pointed at him and he was fucking done. He was so fucking done.

He grabbed the hand tangled in his hair, yanked on it, his other fist slamming into the guys throat. As soon as he was free he threw himself at the gun that Dean had dropped on the floor. Managed to grab it, turn around and shot the guy in the chest. The guy stumbled back a step, looked down at the hole the bullet had made, then looked back up and grinned with those fucking teeth, the sight of it sickening, terrifying. Seth shot him again and again. Four bullets, two in the heart, two in the stomach. He might as well have poked him with a stick.

"Behind you!"

Later on Seth would think that the logical thing to do would have been to crouch. But he didn't. He turned around directly into an oncoming fist. His nose made a sickening crunch. He stumbled backwards, hot blood gushing over his mouth, his eyes watering from the pain. An elbow locked around his throat and brought him down to his knees. Someone let out a blood curdling scream and Seth found himself terrified that it was Dean. That it was Dean's scream. Something warm splattered across his front, across his shirt and arms. He was yanked backwards. The arm around his throat tightened.

"Let him go."

That was Dean. That was Dean's voice. Seth blinked furiously so he could see. He was struggling to breathe, copper taste flooding his tongue, his nose and mouth full of blood.

"Back off or I kill him," the voice next to his head hissed.  
A stench of rotten meat and decay bathed Seth's face and he gagged on the blood.

"Let him go and I won't kill you."

For a few seconds or hours or years nothing happened. Complete silence.

Then he was pushed forward and he caught himself on his palms, one of them sliding in blood. Sound of running feet on the stairs, then a different pair of hands grabbing his upper arms, helping him up.

"Seth?"

Dean. Dean's voice. He'd never been happier to hear a voice of a lunatic and a killer.

"Hey, you okay? You with me? Look at me."

There was an edge of panic in his voice and Seth didn't know what to make of it, couldn't think, couldn't process anything. He latched on to Dean's shirt and let himself be led to the bed. Once he was sitting down, he actually saw the rest of the room. Blood everywhere. Pools of it on the floor, streaks on the walls, splatter across the ceiling. One fully beheaded guy, torso next to the door, the head nowhere to be seen. Two others, their neck severed so savagely and thoroughly that only some skin and bone was still holding their skulls attached. No sign of those teeth. Just regular looking guys. Regular looking, nearly headless guys. He was gonna throw up.

"Hey," Dean's hand tightened on his arm,

"Look at me."

It was almost a relief to focus on a familiar face. Dean was splattered with blood too, his t-shirt ripped and saturated again, his hands coated in it.

"Is anything broken?" he asked.

Seth studied the rips in Dean's shirt, the torn skin underneath. He'd just stitched all that up.

"I think-- I think my nose is broken."

"I think so too. Anything else?"

"I think I'm going insane."

Dean snorted.

"No. I'm sure you'll wish you were, but you're as sane as I am."

Seth wanted to laugh. Was that supposed to be comforting?

"We need to leave here now," Dean said, glancing around the room, "can you walk?"

Seth could barely think. He could barely breathe. He felt like his fucking mind was disintegrating. But he was pretty sure he could walk. Hell, he could run.

## Chapter Management

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Chapter 7: Sorry, not sorry

## Chapter Text

The car was unbearably silent. Dean itched to turn the music on. He almost caught himself humming. He fidgeted while driving, not sure if he should say something. Seth kept staring out the windshield with that creepy blank face on, like he'd just checked out for a while. Dean supposed it was a lot to take in. Anyone else would be curled up in the corner eating their hair. But Seth was different. Dean knew it, he could tell from the first time he saw the kid standing above him in the ambulance with a gun clutched in his hand. Seth might be young and green but there was some serious steel underneath all that pretty. Dean had seen him punch the fucking vamp in the throat. Had seen him grab the gun, pull off four perfect shots. Those four bullets would have made an ordinary human into a pudding of internal organs. The kid had good, raw talent. Dean had never come across anyone like Seth in all the years he'd been hunting. Of course, he couldn't actually say that. Seth didn't seem in the frame of mind where he'd take it as a compliment that it was. But the silence was driving him crazy.

Finally, he reached over and turned on the radio. Not too loud or anything, acceptable volume, Zeppelin. Who could complain about Zeppelin? Seth didn't. He didn't even blink. Maybe Dean should nudge him. You know, to make sure he wasn't catatonic or whatever. His fingers tapped on the steering wheel and he made himself stop. He should feel more guilty. He knew that. He'd yanked a perfectly normal guy out of his perfectly ordinary life. Unless Seth was really good at pretending that he didn't see what he saw, his life would probably never be the same again. And that was Dean's fault. He'd opened that door and dragged Seth through it. To be fair, he didn't know that the vamps would go as far as to track him down. One of the ones he killed in the alley must have been important. Probably someone's mate. Still, he shouldn't have brought Seth with him. That was kind of obvious now, after the fact. So yeah, he felt a little guilty. But not as much as he should. A part of him was happy that Seth saw what he saw, that he knew now that Dean wasn't just some crazy guy who killed people for fun.

It never really bothered him that people thought he was crazy. Sometimes he even considered it a perk of the job. But with Seth it kind of rankled. He'd never felt such an urge to explain himself,

to justify the things he'd done until the kid's fucking eyes were turned his way, until Seth had called him a murderer. And that part actually WAS crazy. Dean had no issue admitting it. It made no fucking sense. He'd known the guy less than twenty four hours and all he wanted was for Seth to like him. Maybe because Seth was the first person he'd met outside the hunting circles that he actually liked. Maybe because he had been alone for over a year now and the lack of human contact was turning out to be a lot more unpleasant than he'd imagined. Or he could just be honest and admit that Seth was fucking hot, that Dean just really wanted to fuck him ten ways to Sunday, wanted to lick him all over, taste every part of him, bend him over every available surface, hear him fucking moan.

He shifted in the driver's seat and put a quick stop to that train of thought. Maybe he should just turn the music up.

Seth cleared his throat, blinked a few times looking like he was just waking up. He reached up, touched his nose and groaned. Dean winced in sympathy. That was a pity too. He'd had such a pretty nose. Dean wouldn't risk trying to reset it himself and there was no way in hell he was going anywhere near a major hospital. It would just have to heal the way it was.

"Is there anything to drink?" Seth asked, his voice rough.

Dean fumbled in the back seat one handed and came up with a flask. Handed it to Seth. Seth turned it over in his hands as if he had no clue what it was.

"No. I meant-- never mind. Fuck it."

He downed half the damn thing in one enormous gulp then sputtered and coughed for a few minutes. It was actually adorable. Dean expected him to hand the flask back but up it went again and Dean had to poke him to put it down.

"Hey! That's the only booze in the car. Share, huh?"

Seth gave it back about quarter full and Dean made a mental note to stop at a liquor store before they found a motel.

"I have questions," Seth said, his voice even rougher now from the whiskey.

"Ok."

"Did I see what I think I saw?"

Dean took a deep breath,

"Well, that depends."

"On what?"

"Whether you wanna be able to go back to your life pretending that nothing happened. Because, if I tell you the truth, there's no going back."

"What are you saying? You can tell me the truth but you'll have to kill me? Keep me chained up in your basement? In the trunk? What the fuck does that mean, there's no going back?"

Ok, a little hysterical there. Dean didn't know how to deal with hysterics. He reminded himself that he'd put the kid in this situation. Seth had the right to be upset.

"No, it doesn't mean any of those things. It just means that once you know the truth, you won't be able to look at the world the same way."

"Well, that sounds like a pile of bullshit, so why don't you just give me the truth."

From hysterical to snarky in point five seconds. Dean was torn between frustration and an urge to laugh.

"What do you think you saw?"

"I-- I don't-- teeth? Lots of fucking teeth? And I shot a guy. Four times. It didn't do anything."

"That's because it wasn't a 'guy.'"

"Then what the hell was it?"

"Vampire."

Seth was silent for so long that Dean felt the urge to poke him all over again. Then he burst out laughing, a full on giggle fest, snorts and everything. And Dean wouldn't have minded it at all if there wasn't a desperate edge to it, like it could turn into sobs at any moment.

"Ok," he said calmly, "you think I'm crazy. But think about it. You work in a city. It's a good sized city and you've always known there are things creeping in the dark. You probably told yourself it was people, crazy people like me. Or that you imagined things, or that finding a dead body drained of blood was not really that strange. You made up an excuse for it; everyone does it. Maybe you've found skin, as if someone had just slipped out of it like a fucking snake. Or you've gotten a 911 call and found a mangled dead body in a house that was completely locked down, no sign of forceful entry, all the alarms still set. Or you've seen people's brains so flooded with blood that it defies any medical explanation, like they took a trip to the moon without any protective equipment, and I bet you put it down as a brain aneurysm but it fucking wasn't, you know it wasn't, you just couldn't explain it any other way."

Seth had stopped laughing. Dean looked over and saw his face had turned sheet white.

"Um, are you--"

"Pull over," he croaked and Dean skidded to the side of the road.

Just in time too cause Seth had barely managed to get the door open before all that booze he drank splattered on the pavement.

"Aw man, that was good whiskey. You don't throw up the good whiskey."

--

The hotel room was fucking hideous. Dean usually didn't notice that shit because they had all started to look exactly the same a long time ago, but this one was extra hideous. Big, pink flowers on the bedspreads. Paintings of some creepy looking shepherdess with a crook, looking like she was about to drown in layers of flounce. Pink and orange wallpaper. Orange curtains with more of those hideous pink flowers. It was like the 70's and the 90's got together and threw up all over the place.

Speaking of throwing up, Seth still looked pale as a ghost. And no wonder. Dean was starting to feel a little nauseous himself from all the fucking pink. He'd stood in the middle of the room for a few minutes looking completely lost while Dean carried the bags inside, then locked himself in the bathroom. When he came out he didn't look any better but his face and hands were clean. Dean dug through the duffle and threw another pair of jeans his way, along with a clean shirt. He turned away like a gentleman so Seth could change without closing himself in the bathroom again.

He pulled out a fresh pair of pants and a shirt for himself too, making another mental note to stop somewhere for more clothes. Between him and Seth and all the fucking vamps, half his fucking clothes were shredded and the other half were blood stained. He'd had to scrub most of the blood off his face and button up his jacket to stop at the store and then rent a room. Still, the guy who sold him the bottle of booze definitely noticed the blood streaks all over Dean's jeans. He didn't say anything though. When you work at a 24 hour liquor store right off the highway, a little blood was probably nothing to write home about.

He took his shirt off and was about to put on another one when Seth finally spoke, for the first time since he threw up on the side of the road,  
"I should change those. The bandages. And it looks like you'll need more stitching."

Well fuck if that wasn't totally unexpected. Dean thought he'd probably have to wave his gun around to get the kid to patch him up again. He definitely didn't expect him to offer.

Seth was already grabbing his bag though, pulling out the kit, looking less lost now that he was doing something.

"The light sucks in here," he commented.

"I can move the other lamp, will that help?"

"Yeah. I guess. It won't hurt."

--



Then Seth was sticking a needle in and out of Dean's skin again. And damn everything if it wasn't fast becoming one of Dean's favorite pastimes. So maybe he was a little twisted. The combination of pain and the kid's hands and his breath on Dean's shoulder, it was all just sort of... nice. He'd spent so long sowing himself up, he'd almost forgotten what it felt like to let someone else put him back together. Without holding a gun to their head and making them do it. Cause that didn't really count.

"So," Seth exhaled and Dean shivered, "that wound on your shoulder I patched up yesterday. The one that looked like-- like someone tore a chunk out of you with their teeth. That was--"  
"Vamps."  
"Right."

Dean expected more questions but Seth worked in silence, faster and more efficient than the last time, and Dean would like to think that he was getting comfortable with Dean, Dean's skin and all that came with it. Because it would be nice if the kid didn't flinch when Dean touched him. It would be nice if there was more touching. Sometime in the future. That didn't involve a needle and all the blood. Not that he was complaining.

"This is the last of the bandages," Seth grumbled, wrapping it around Dean's torso, "so we either need to get more or you need to stop getting yourself all torn up."

Something light and warm crawled through Dean's chest at his words.

"I'll do my best to stay tear free," he said, trying to suppress a grin and not really succeeding.

Seth finished up and went to wash his hands again. When he came back, Dean offered him the bottle of whiskey, sort of figuring Seth wouldn't go for it after all that booze hurling he did earlier. But the kid surprised him again, grabbing the bottle out of his hands and taking a long swig, as if he'd been drinking cheap whiskey out a bottle his whole life. He passed it back and settled across from Dean.

"So," Dean said lightly, "Still think I'm crazy?"

Seth snorted,

"Yeah, I'm pretty sure you're crazy. But I believe you."

"You do?"

"Yeah. I mean, I know what I saw. I can't pretend I didn't. And some of the things you said back there--"

he rubbed the back of his neck, "there was a thing. Last year. A whole family. Husband, wife, fourteen year old twins. All dead in their beds. Chest split wide open, ribs pulled back like wings. All four identical. No sign of struggle, no fingerprints, footprints, fibers, nothing. The CSI team couldn't make heads or tails of it. The cops either. All doors and windows locked, alarm armed." He looked up and Dean saw him struggling with it, saw him wishing he could take it back, the knowledge.

Now he felt guilty. Now he really felt like shit.

“And there were other things, over the years,” Seth went on, “weird things. But like you said, people make up explanations for it, and even when the explanations don’t make any sense you just accept them, you know? Cause what’s the alternative?”

“The alternative is that every monster is real.”

Seth shook his head,

“I keep thinking I’m gonna wake up and this’ll all be a bad dream.”

“I’m sorry,” Dean said.

“Yeah. Me too.”

They sat there, the bottle traveling back and forth and Dean hadn’t been lying, he really was sorry. But he was also kind of happy and comfortable and it was nice to be passing the bottle to someone else every few minutes, it was nice to not be drinking alone. And it was nice that Seth would look at him every once in a while, and that their fingers brushed when the bottle passed hands. He found himself telling Seth stories from his early days of hunting, funny stories, like that time he mispronounced a banishing spell and lit himself on fire, and the time he was sure he’d found a vampire but it was just another hunter and he got his ass whooped until the guy figured out that Dean wasn’t a monster. And Seth laughed, an actual genuine laugh without that desperate note in it and Dean felt in the pit of his stomach, all along his spine, in his fucking groin, and that’s when he knew that he didn’t just shoot himself in the foot with this one.

Oh, no. It was much worse than that.

Chapter Management

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Chapter 8: Snow Shoe

Chapter Text

The cheap, crappy motel Tv had nothing to offer at 4am. Still, it was on, an old movie silently playing. ‘Bells Are Ringing’ with Judy Holliday. Seth had seen it a million times while growing up. It was one of his mom’s favorite movies.

“Crap,” he said quietly.

“What?” Dean said from the other bed.

They were both a little drunk. Well, Seth was probably drunk. He wasn’t much of a drinker but tonight had seemed a good time to start. Dean had gone out before midnight and gotten another

bottle whiskey and a couple of pizzas. The half empty boxes sat on the floor, grease seeping through the cardboard and onto the already stained carpet. The empty bottle had somehow made its way to the foot of Seth's bed, looking like soldier fallen in battle.

"My parents," Seth said,  
"they must be freaking out."

Dean shifted. Even without turning his head, Seth could see his legs sprawled out on top of the bed cover, his boots still on.

"Sorry," he said and Seth shrugged.

"Never mind, I'll see them tomorrow. Or I guess it's already today."

Dean was still for a few seconds, then he grabbed the new bottle out of the paper bag and cracked it open. Seth wanted a shower. He was so fucking sweaty and filthy and disgusting, a hair away from being able to smell himself. It would have to wait until the morning though. Or at least until everything stopped spinning.

"Your parents," Dean said,  
"what are they like?"

Seth rolled onto his side.

Dean had put a shirt on before he went to get the food and was still wearing it. Seth kind of wished he'd take it off again. He'd probably be embarrassed about thinking it in the morning but at that moment, he couldn't help but wonder what the rest of him looked like without all those clothes in the way. Were his legs as muscled as the rest of him? Did he have scars there too?

"Dad's a doctor. Primary Care. We're not too happy with each other right now."

Dean's gaze was locked on the Tv, the open bottle resting in between his legs, but Seth knew he was listening.

"I was supposed to go to med school. Be a doctor like the old man. Didn't really care for it. Sitting in the office all day long, listening to old ladies complain about their thyroid and blood pressure, I think I'd fucking die of boredom."

Dean's lips twitched.

"Mom's a shrink. Works for the VA. PTSD and all that shit. How about yours?"

Dean's fingers picked at the bottle label.

"They're dead."

"Oh," Seth said, suddenly feeling like a jerk,  
"I'm sorry."

Dean shrugged, took a swig from the bottle and offered it to Seth. Seth thought about refusing then found himself taking the bottle. What difference did it make now anyway?

"Is that why you... do what you do?"

Dean shifted lower in bed as if trying to sink into it. Seth cursed his drunk mouth. Is this really something he should be asking about?

"Mom got killed by a demon when I was four," Dean said, voice emotionless.

"Dad spent the next 20 years trying to hunt it down. Died last year around Christmas. Vampires."

"Oh," Seth said again,  
"the same ones that you-"

Dean was already shaking his head,

"No. The ones that did it, I hunted them down first. Found them in North Dakota three months ago."

Seth's stomach twisted.

What kind of life was that? Never mind all the monsters being real; after half a bottle of crappy whiskey he could sort of push the whole insanity of that under the carpet. But to spend your life hunting monsters?

"Do you... do you do this all the time? Hunt vampires?"

"Among other things. You could say it's a family business."

Seth sat up and the room tilted. He waited for it to straighten back up before handing the bottle back to Dean.

"Alone? No brothers? Sisters? Uncles?"

Dean paused, something flickering across his face. He'd yet to turn and look at Seth and Seth couldn't read the expression from the profile. Whatever it was, it was gone as soon as it came.

"No," Dean said shortly and tipped the bottle.

Seth watched his adam's apple move, the cords in his neck standing out, the bruised knuckles wrapped around the bottle neck. It was all porn right now. He was drunk and stupid and Dean was all porn. Seth closed his eyes.

--

He woke up miserable, his head the size of a melon, his mouth sandpaper dry, his stomach rolling alarmingly. Some godawful sound was sawing at the inside of his skull, making his eyes water before he could even open them all the way. It stopped, then started up again, even worse than the first time. Did he fall asleep in the break room again? Ambulance? Whatever patient that was it sounded like they were trying to eject their lungs from their ribcage. Gross. There was drool under his cheek. His back was cramped from lying all twisted up. He blinked a couple of times and the light nearly blinded him. He groaned.

Hotel room. End of the world as we know it wallpaper. Afternoon sun beating down through the windows, burning his eyelids.

That's right. He'd been kidnapped by a crazy guy who maybe wasn't so crazy, monsters were real, his nose was broken and he'd gotten piss ass drunk as a fuck you to it all. The coughing went on and on and Seth felt his stomach turn over. If it didn't stop soon he was gonna throw up again. It sounded like a pair of lungs drowning in buckets of phlegm. It sounded like... pneumonia cough. Some vile, untreated fucking pneumonia.

He sat up so quickly that the entire world tipped completely sideways, straightened up violently, then started tipping the other way. His whole body rebelled at being vertical, nausea clogging his throat, his eyeballs pulsing. The cough stopped.

Dean was sitting cross legged on the other bed, the hideous comforter wrapped around him, a cup of something clenched in his hands. He looked like shit. He looked worse now than he had after losing all that blood yesterday. Still, when he saw Seth, he smiled.

"Good morning sunshine," he rasped, "You look like you're gonna barf."  
"Don't tempt me," Seth mumbled.

The room was hot. His shirt, Dean's shirt, was plastered to his back. But Dean was shivering.

Seth stood up, ignoring the indignant thud inside his skull, and sat down next to him. Reached over and cupped his jaw, feeling the heat wafting off Dean's breath, his glands swollen, his skin searing hot. He ignored the shocked look on Dean's face and peered into the cup. Then snatched it out of his hands.

"Hey!"

"No coffee," Seth said firmly.

"What? Why?"

"Because. How long have you had the cough?"

Dean blinked at him. Glanced at the cup in Seth's hands as if debating whether to wrestle him for it.

"Couple of weeks maybe."

"Tightness in your chest? Fever? Chills? Difficulty breathing?"

"Maybe, I don't-- why?"

"You have fucking pneumonia. You've probably had it for a while. You look like shit, you're running a fever and that cough sounds like you're dying."

Seth got up and chucked the coffee in the trash barrel, cup and all,

"Coffee dehydrates you. You need fluids. Water, juice, maybe tea."

"I hate tea--"

"Definitely need antibiotics now, before it gets so bad you gotta go into a hospital."

"There's no way in hell--"

"We need to get our hands on some Penicillin or Cephalexin. 250mg at least. You'll need a ten day dose."

"Wait--"

"That fever's ridiculous, I'm surprised you can even sit up. I could fry a fucking egg on you skin right now."

He bent over his first response bag and felt everything in his stomach roll forward and into his throat. He swallowed it down impatiently, sticking his hand past all the supplies and trying to feel for the bottle of Advil.

"How do you know it's not just a cold? Or flu?"

"Because," Seth said patiently, "I was pre med. I know what pneumonia looks like and sounds like. Where the hell are we anyway? Is there a town nearby? We need to find a pharmacy."

His fingers finally closed around the bottle of Advil. Maybe it would bring the fever down. A little bit. God, he wished he was carrying something heavier. Even 800mg of Motrin would be welcome. And to think of all the shit they left behind in the ambulance.

"You keep saying 'we'," Dean said.

Seth paused.

Home.

He'd been working overtime for a solid week now, he could barely remember the last time he set foot in his apartment for anything else except a change of clothes and maybe a quick nap. He'd been showering at the hospital. Hell, he'd slept more often at the hospital in the last month or so than he'd slept in his apartment. He hadn't had a day off in months, and now... Now he knew there were much worse things out there than the drunks and the psychotic murderers. He wasn't looking forward to seeing every case with different eyes.

That's if they even let him go back to work right away. Chances were he'd first have to be interrogated by every cop in NY state, FBI, and God knew who else. His boss would put him on paid leave for a while and force him to go through counseling. His parents...

His parents would flip out. They would insist he goes back home with them. Mom was probably already writing a workbook on how to rescue Seth from irreversible psychological trauma and if dad wasn't in the process of suing the hospital right at that moment, Seth would be very much surprised.

Then there was Dean. The crazy guy who almost strangled him. Sitting on the hotel bed with that nightmare of a comforter wrapped around him, the circles under his eyes black and purple, shivering in a ninety degree room, sounding like his fucking lung was about to collapse. The crazy guy who spends his life hunting monsters, wheezing painfully, his parents dead, his knuckles torn and bruised, staring at Seth. As if waiting for something.

There was one single styrofoam cup left next to the coffee maker. Seth snatched it up, went into the bathroom, filled it with water from the tap. Glanced at his face in the mirror and fought the urge to laugh. Dean had called him pretty that night in the ambulance. Well, there was nothing pretty about his face now. He looked like... like someone had punched him and shattered his nose. Dad would have a hissy fit. There would be talk of plastic surgery, of getting the hospital to pay for it. Seth would probably just go along with it. He'd learned to pick his battles over the years.

He brought the cup back to Dean and shook three pills out of the bottle. Dean took them without a word. His eyebrows twitched when Seth settled on the bed in front of him.

"Can we stay here or should we be heading out? Do you think FBI is combing the state looking for you?"

Dean blinked at him, then looked away and cleared his throat,

"Probably. Yeah. Can't stay here."

"Then where? Connecticut? Pennsylvania? New Jersey?"

"Pennsylvania. Easier to hide there."

"All right, then we should head out," he said, "but before we leave the state one of us needs to break into a pharmacy. Unless you know an easier way to get your hands on some Keflex."

Dean's lips twitched,

"Nope. Breaking and entering is what I usually do."

--

Seth ended up being the burglar since he knew what he was looking for and where to find it. Dean waited in the car. In the passenger seat. Because Seth was the one driving.

Ordinarily he would have rebelled. The kid probably left fingerprints all over the place and made God knows how many other rookie mistakes. But Dean felt like shit. Even his fucking bones hurt. He hadn't been really sick since... since he was eight years old and he came down with a nasty case of the flu. Dad had dropped him off at Bobby's, took off into the parts unknown and hadn't come back for him until the seasons changed. And as much as he'd liked staying with Bobby, Dean always remembered it as that one time he was too weak to hunt and dad had left him behind. He'd been sick a few times since then but never as bad and he'd never said a word about it. With dad, you either carried your weight or got the fuck out of the way.

He'd never felt this vulnerable though.

He couldn't guess what the kid was thinking. What would possess him to stick around. The night before Dean was sure that by the morning, Seth would be long gone. He'd hidden the keys just in case the kid got tempted to steal the car, and hoped he wouldn't wake up with FBI breaking down the motel room door. Instead, he woke up coughing, feeling worse than he had in days, with Seth snoring in the other bed.

He should have left him at the first gas station they passed. Stopped the car and told him to get out. It's not like Dean needed some kid to take care of him. He would have made it back to Bobby's in a day or so and Bobby would have known what to do. The man had a damn pharmacy stashed away. And this was fucking dangerous. Not part of the plan. With every passing hour Seth's picture was being seen by more people, rotating through local police departments, flashing on Tv stations, being printed in the small town papers. All it would take was one person to see him, to recognize him, and the avalanche of every available law department would be down their neck in minutes. Dean had enough people after him already. This was just making it worse.

For a total of ten seconds, Seth's hands were on his face, his neck. Apparently, that was all it took for Dean to throw common sense out the window. It was pathetic.

What was even more pathetic was Dean sitting huddled in the passenger seat of his own damn car while this kid robbed a pharmacy. Feeling like a truck ran him over, eyes burning from the fever, wearing two sweatshirts and still shivering. Expecting to hear an alarm sound any second, telling himself that he would just slide to the driver's seat and gun it out of town, but knowing he would end up going after the kid instead, probably getting himself arrested in the process.

He was so fucked.

Seth came out of the shadows behind the pharmacy with no less than three bags of crap. He got into the car, pushed the bags on the floor next to Dean's feet and wasted no time getting them out of the parking lot.



"No alarm?" Dean asked.

"Disarmed it."

Dean studied his profile, the small smug smile, the ruffled hair. He looked right behind the wheel of the car. He looked right behind the wheel of THIS car. He looked like he belonged.

"How?"

Seth's smile widened, a hint of a dimple appearing on his cheek,

"Perk of the job."

Dean looked away. The fever was frying his brain. That's all it was.

"They teach first responders how to disarm alarms?"

Seth shrugged,

"Not exactly. A lot of times the alarm is... an annoyance when you're trying to find someone in distress. So I found ways to shut them up."

He turned and grinned at Dean,

"We don't talk about it. It's not exactly procedure, you know?"

Dean found himself smiling back. Suddenly he felt giddy. They were taking an exit ramp for the thruway, the night was still young, so far no one was after them, and he had a beautiful boy next to him. And maybe this was nothing, maybe by tomorrow night he would be alone behind the wheel again with just radio for company. Or dead, gunned down by cops. But right then and there, it felt good.

It felt right.

---

Seth parked the car and shut the engine off. Stretched with a sigh, the soft crackles in his back reminding him that he wasn't used to sitting this long. It had rained here at one point, probably a few hours before they drove into town. He rolled down the window and leaned back in the seat, enjoying the smell of wet grass and earth, so different from the city stench he'd grown accustomed to over the years. It was still early morning and through the canopy of branches overhead he could see blue sky.

Dean was sleeping.

He'd grumbled at the bottles of Gatorade Seth had stolen from the pharmacy, grumbled at the vitamins Seth pushed into his hand, rolled his eyes at the pile of granola bars, but he ate, took his antibiotic and the vitamins, washed them down with grape Gatorade, then passed out in the passenger seat. He was still curled up in the same position, like an oversized cat, head resting against the door panel. His lips were cracked from the fever and his face still pale but Seth thought he looked a little better. And younger. Asleep, Dean looked like a small boy in his

daddy's sweatshirt. All freckles and eyelashes. With all the lines of his face softened out and his lips slightly parted, fingers barely visible above the oversized sleeves, he looked defenseless. Which was ridiculous. The guy had nearly lifted him off the ground with one hand. By his throat. Not defenseless. Dangerous, and probably a little crazy too, monsters or no.

Seth wanted to reach over and touch him. Not because he wanted to feel Dean's skin again. No, he just wanted to make sure that the fever had gone down. That's all.

He carefully brushed his fingers against one freckled cheekbone and Dean's eyelashes fluttered. Then he was gripping Seth's wrist tightly, sitting up with a jerk, his other hand fumbling through the sweatshirt.

"Hey, woah," Seth said quickly, "easy, it's just me."

Dean blinked and let go of his wrist, his eyes traveling past Seth as if looking for a threat.

"Where are we."

"Snow Shoe, Pennsylvania."

"Snow Shoe? Are you kidding?"

"No."

"Why are we in Snow Shoe, Pennsylvania?"

Seth pointed at the windshield and the red cabin visible through the trees,

"That."

Dean studied it for a few seconds and Seth had an odd feeling that Dean could probably tell him the square footage of the entire place and when was the last time someone had actually stayed there from just looking at it. Maybe not crazy. Maybe slightly creepy was a better term.

"Whose is it?"

"A friend of a friend," Seth said, not wanting to explain that he'd dated that particular friend of a friend just long enough to spend a weekend up here and find out they had nothing in common.

"They don't come up here this early in the year. It's a summer place. They lock it down in September and open it back up in May every year."

Dean still looked wary.

"It's thirteen acres," Seth went on, "No neighbors, no one even comes up this way. No one I know would ever guess that I would come here."

"Not even the friend of a friend?"

"An ex friend of a friend. And no."

"An ex girl friend of a friend?" Dean asked, the corner of his lips turning up slightly.

"No," Seth said shortly.

He would not have this conversation. There were some things that were no one's business and this was definitely one of them.

Dean seemed to get the hint.

“All right,” he said, “Snow Shoe it is then.”

## Chapter Management

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Chapter 9: Eddie-fucking-Bauer

## Chapter Text

Dean couldn't tell if it was the fever or if it was really fucking freezing inside the cabin and out. The place was good sized, open floor plan, living room leading into the kitchen. The bedrooms, or probably more than one, looked to be tucked in under the left slope of the roof. To the right, an enormous wood stove sat cold and empty. He frowned at the cathedral ceiling. Impractical waste of space that was probably a bitch to heat. He dumped his duffle on the floor, feeling his teeth starting to chatter.

“Sit,” Seth pointed to a chair next to the wood stove.

He'd dropped the bags on the living table and made his way into the kitchen. Dean could hear him opening and closing the drawers, muttering to himself. For a place that belonged to an ex friend of a friend, he seemed pretty comfortable with his surroundings. Dean fought the urge to give him shit about it. He was too goddamned miserable to be able to put any serious effort into it anyway. Instead he huddled in the chair, wishing he had his old sleeping bag. When he took it with him on a hunt for a wendigo last year, the thing had been ten years old at least and still sturdy as fuck. And it had gotten torn to shreds. He never got around to replacing it either.

Seth came back and knelt next to the stove with a pile of rolled up newspapers.

“There's a gas furnace downstairs,” he said, sounding apologetic, “but it just heats the water. It's a summer place.”

The kid surprised him again by getting the fire going in just a few minutes, with nothing more than a few pieces of paper and some dry wood stacked next to the stove. Soon, Dean could feel the heat wafting off the thing, seeping through his clothes.

“There's more wood stacked in the crawl space under the house,” Seth went on, “It should be enough for a few days. You hungry?”

“Starving.”

--

Everything he'd stolen from the pharmacy and everything still left in his first responder bag was laid out on the living room table. He was running low on saline. He'd been so fucking nervous and jittery in the damn pharmacy that it just slipped his mind. It wasn't a big deal; the world wasn't gonna end if he ran out of saline but it still irked that he forgot such a basic thing.

"Hey there, sunshine. Shirtless and running a fever here. You think we can get on with it?"  
"Turn around, the light's better that way."

Dean straddled the chair and faced the stove without a word. Seth felt his stomach tighten. It wasn't the saline he was worried about. He didn't know what he was worried about. But without the added barrier of shock or booze or anything else, Dean's skin suddenly seemed overwhelming.

Waterproof dressings. That was all he was doing. He could put those babies on blindfolded. But his hands shook as he cut the gauze off, peeling it off the stitches. There were old scars there. A white puckered stab wound in the upper shoulder, an old shallow slash curving around the ribs, what looked like burn scars peppering the lower back. He'd seen them all before, back at the farm house and then later in the hotel room. But there was something personal about them now. He'd always had the ability, common in his line of work, to separate himself from his patients. It was a necessary thing; gaping wounds, torn flesh, suffering of others, day in and day out, it wasn't something anyone could carry lightly. He'd learned to shut it out, push it away, move on to the next case. It didn't always work, especially with the really bad cases. And it wasn't working now.

"How old are you?" he asked.  
Dean's shoulders shifted slightly.  
"24."

So many scars for someone so young. Seth's fingers hesitated over the rough skin, feeling the uneven grooves. No one had patched that up when it happened, it was left to heal on its own. And it had gone deep. The muscle under his fingers moved and he jerked his hand back.

"The scars freaking you out?" Dean asked, sounding genuinely curious.

No. It wasn't about the scars. The old ones or the new ones. It was the fact that they were becoming familiar, a map he'd began memorizing without knowing he was doing so. Getting used to the way they feel under his hands, as if they were his own, newly discovered and already a part of him.

No. If anything was freaking him out it was all the muscle. The sheer fucking expanse of Dean's back, the length of space from shoulder to shoulder. The freckles. Faint dusting of them across the shoulders, like someone had shook a brush of gold flakes above him.

"That should have been patched up," he said, keeping his voice steady, "It wouldn't have scarred as badly."

"I was busy. It healed." Dean said shortly.

Seth dropped the stained gauze in the trash can and inspected the stitches, grimacing at the first few sets. God, he'd done such a piss poor job with those, it was a miracle none of them were infected. The rest looked better, neater. There would be some scarring but nothing bad. A few might go away completely.

He tore into the packages, carefully covering the stitches with a gauze pad and applying two tegaderm dressings to each, just to be on the safe side.

"So," Dean said, "you seem to know your way around this place pretty well."

"I spent a weekend here last year."

"With an ex friend of a friend?"

"Yes."

"What was his name?"

Seth paused for a moment, then found himself pressing the last dressing in place with a little more force than necessary.

Dean hissed.

"Sorry. It's done. I've gotta take them off when you come out so just... let me know when you're all through."

"Can't just leave them on?"

"No. The wounds need to breathe. And I gotta make sure no water's gotten underneath."

"All right."

Dean stood up and Seth took a step back. It was ridiculous, he was the taller one by at least an inch or two, but Dean had a way of looming when he was too close, crowding him in. He turned away to pack the rest of the supplies back up so he wouldn't have to watch him across the cabin. So he wouldn't have to see that ridiculous expanse of uncovered skin. So he wouldn't think about the exact moment Dean took the rest of his clothes off when the bathroom door closed behind him. Dean stepping into the shower, skin glistening under the spray of hot water.

No.

Supplies. He should be thinking about supplies.

They'd both had a can of tomato soup each and there was plenty of other cans stacked up in the pantry, everything from beef stew to canned peaches. It wasn't gonna be enough. They needed bread, fruit, vegetables. Dean needed actual food, especially with the amount of pills Seth was having him take every six hours. Seth knew there was a small stash of emergency cash somewhere, James had dug into it when they were here. It was time to find out how much they were working with. And what else they would need in town because Seth didn't wanna make more than one trip.

He started in the bedrooms because it seemed like the most obvious place.  
Not because he couldn't hear the shower running any more.

No. He had other things on his mind.

--

"Raiding the place?"

Seth jumped and Dean instantly felt bad. The kid seemed twitchier around him now than he'd been a few hours ago and Dean found that it bothered him. Was it the way he reacted in the car? The kid had fucking startled him. He's lucky Dean didn't break his wrist.

The scars? It's not like Seth hadn't seen them all that first morning in the farmhouse kitchen. No one had ever complained about them. Actually, most of the girls he'd slept with over the years had liked them just fine. Except that Seth wasn't some drunk chick he'd picked up at a roadside bar.

'That should have been patched up,' he'd said, 'It wouldn't have scarred as badly.'

His body had become a damn road map of monsters. Once, he'd been ashamed of it. A long fucking time ago. Nothing he wanted to think about or remember. He didn't like the feeling of that shame creeping back and he definitely didn't like the sudden urge to put on a shirt.

Dean glanced around the bedroom, the solid oak bed, cream and gray bedding neatly made, everything tasteful but not overwhelming. A summer cabin. He could suddenly picture the guy Seth had spent a weekend here with. One of those khaki wearing douche bags who hiked through the woods in a five hundred dollar pair of boots and played tennis on the weekends. And why not? Seth's parents probably owned a summer home too. A family with an MD and a PhD under one roof, they probably owned two.

"I found cash," Seth said, "Couple of hundred, enough for the few things we need in town. And I thought you might want a change of clothes."

And he was handing Dean a neatly folded pair of flannel bottoms and a long sleeve shirt. That probably belonged to whats-his-name. A glance down showed him an Eddie Bauer tag on the shirt and he would bet his life that there was one just like it on the flannel pants. They looked and felt brand new in his hands, probably never worn.

Something bitter and angry crawled up his throat.

"I'm good," he said, handing them back.

"All your clothes are torn to shreds."

"I said I'm good," he repeated tightly, suddenly hating this goddamned cabin and everything in it, "you gonna get this shit off me or what?"

--

Then he was straddling the chair again, the heat from the stove breathing in his face, Seth's fingers on his skin. The gentle, careful tug of dressings coming off, as if Seth was afraid he'd hurt him if he pulled too hard. And he was still angry. Why the fuck was he here with some rich kid? Because he's pretty? He was gonna get himself fucking arrested for a pretty boy. Get himself killed for nothing. Stupid. Every single decision from the moment he'd seen the kid standing above him with a gun had been a mistake. And for what?

"So, I'm curious," he said, "what exactly are you doing?"

"Um, taking the dressings off?"

"No. What are you doing here. With me. I doubt you're looking for more excitement. Your job probably has plenty of that. So what is it? Another daddy rebellion? A way to stick it to the old man? Or did you just decide to run away from life for a while."

Seth paused, his hand warm on Dean's shoulder blade, then the gentle tugging went on as if nothing had happened.

"I wouldn't... hurt my dad. Either of my parents. Not like this. And my life is okay. Most of the time."

"Right. You like your parents and you like your life but you decided to take a road trip with FBI's most wanted instead. That makes sense. Exactly what a normal person would do."

"You needed help."

"Oh no," Dean snorted, "don't put this on me. I don't remember asking for help at any point. I definitely don't remember inviting you to come along."

Seth yanked on the last dressing, taking some hair with it. Dean winced.

"I didn't hear you say you didn't want me coming along," Seth said, his voice tight.

"Well, what can I say," Dean smirked, "I'm a sucker for a pretty face. But since I'm probably gonna get shot or locked up because some rich kid wanted to take walk on the wild side, I think I have a right to know."

He turned around to find Seth shoving the supplies back in the bag, his face half-hidden by hair, his hands shaking. And he felt his stomach twist painfully.

Seth took a deep breath before speaking again and Dean was surprised how calm he sounded, "You were hurt and sick and alone and I just thought--"

"What? That you're gonna patch me up like some fucking rabbit with a broken foot? Make me your good deed for the year?"

"No!" Seth finally looked up, his expression incredulous, "God, why would you-- no."

"You sure? Because that's what it looks like from here. Poor crazy guy who spends his life hunting monsters, all alone, no family, no friends, so you take him in like a stray dog because you feel bad. Because in your world all the cuts get stitched up so they don't scar, boyfriends wear Eddie-fucking-Bauer shirts, and the hard decisions involve telling your daddy you don't wanna go to med school. Half the time you look at me like you're terrified and the other half like I'm a fucking stray dog, so why. Are. You. Here."

And somehow he'd moved closer. He was crowding the kid against the table, expecting the shocked hurt on Seth's face to transform into anger at any moment, already hating himself for it but feeling a sick twist of pleasure at the same time. Because he was right. He knew he was right. Somewhere along the way, maybe as far back as that goddamned ambulance, he'd started falling for this fucking kid. And nothing was ever gonna come of it.

Because he'd come across guys like Seth before. Because rich little boys whose boyfriends owned summer homes never wanted Dean Winchester. If anything, they wanted to brush up against his handguns as he fucked them in the back seat, to feel alive for a few minutes, to feel the danger of it. But once it was all over with, they couldn't run fast or far enough. He'd gotten more honest emotions from a hooker than he'd gotten from guys like Seth. And still, here he was again, with some pretty boy who didn't know what he wanted.

Except that this was so much fucking worse. This was a short, fast trip to nothing but misery. Because Dean knew what he wanted, and he'd never wanted something so fucking badly as he wanted this kid. Wanted him in every way possible. In the hotel room bed next to his, long legs sprawled out while they shared a bottle. In the Impala, behind the wheel, long fingers wrapped around the steering wheel. By his side when he fought, when he slept, when he hunted. He wanted Seth's shoulder brushing his as they walked side by side, Seth's hand touching his, Seth's smile, his fury, his breath. Things he'd never wanted from anyone else, things he couldn't even have imagined wanting three days ago, stupid, small things. This pretty fucking kid he really knew nothing about who stumbled into his life out of nowhere was becoming painfully, infuriatingly important. And Dean was scared shitless. Scared and angry.



Seth exhaled, a shuddery breath Dean could feel brushing the side of his face.

This is when Seth would tell him he's an asshole. Tell him to leave. And Dean was fucking ready to go. Ready to just cut this crazy thing in half right here and now, to put an end to it before it got worse. He expected anything from an insult to a plain old fist in the face.

What he didn't expect was the kid leaning forward, his lips brushing Dean's, his breath hot against Dean's mouth. He definitely didn't expect it to be so soft and light, with no clear anger or need behind it. Everything inside of him grinding to a halt, flooding in confusion, heat spreading across his face as if he's back in second grade and being kissed for the first time. Seth moving back slowly, his eyes wide, looking just as confused. Mouth still parted, a faint blush spreading over his cheeks too, except on Seth it looked as sweet as Dean's first crush, as filthy as the very first porn he'd ever watched. If someone had gathered all the things Dean had ever wanted, all the things his mind sifted through when he jerked off in some random motel, if someone were to force all those fantasies into one single person it would have been Seth at that exact moment, wide eyed and flushed.

And realistically, somewhere in the back of Dean's mind, he still knew that he couldn't have this kid. That he would never be Dean's, no matter what happened between them. But that detail suddenly seemed so small and unimportant. He was already tangling his fingers in Seth's hair, tugging him forward, and it was too late for reason or logic. Seth made a small sound of surprise before his mouth crashed against Dean's and for a few sick, fearful moments Dean was sure that the kid was gonna push him away. Instead, Seth's tongue invaded his mouth, his fingers dug into Dean's arm, his back, pulling him forward and sweet Jesus, the kid's mouth was like sin, sweet and forceful at once, his tongue licking the inside of Dean's mouth like he couldn't stand leaving a corner of it untasted. Dean backed him against the table, pushing his free hand under the kid's shirt, his palm finding the quivering stomach muscles and Seth whined, he fucking whined in Dean's mouth, his fingers tightening, his mouth turning frantic.

It wouldn't change anything. This would actually make it all worse.

But fuck if that mattered next all the blood roaring in Dean's ears, his nose full of that lemon grass scent, Seth's breath moist against his cheek. He wrapped his arm around the kid's waist and lifted him one handed onto the table surface. The bag hit the floor and Seth's coffee cup toppled after it, ceramic shattering. Seth's response was to wrap his legs around Dean tightly, to pull him even closer, short nails scraping against the skin of his lower back. Dean tugged on the kid's shirt blindly, his fingers stupid and shaky, the few seconds Seth's mouth was away from his feeling like years, feeling like he was underwater with no air. He threw the thing off to the side, not caring where it landed, and paused.

Chest rising with each panting breath, hair mussed and lips already swelling, the kid was so fucking beautiful it hurt. Dean could feel the pain of it deep below his breast bone like a delayed

burn of getting shot. His pupils huge and dark, the hollow of his throat already glistening with sweat, stomach muscles visibly quivering as if they could still feel Dean's palm pressing against them.

"Jesus," he said hoarsely, "look at you."

Seth licked his bottom lip and slid closer on the table surface so Dean can feel him, hard and pulsing against his thigh.

"C'mon," he whispered, hands clutching the edge of the table, his hips jerking forward, grinding against Dean.

Dean felt the contact in his fucking spine, like someone had raked a knife down the length of it. He made a sound he couldn't even hear over the blood beating in his mouth, in his throat, behind his eyes. He was gonna fucking come in his pants like some horny fucking teenager.

"C'mon," Seth groaned, surging forward, nails digging into Dean's skin again.

His lips closed over Dean's nipple, sucking it into his mouth, grazing over it with his teeth. Dean moaned, his own voice too raw and too loud and he couldn't have stopped it even if he knew how. He wanted to yank the kid off the table, push him down on his knees, wanted to feel that mouth wrapped around him, wanted to see his own come smeared all over those pretty lips. Except that he was so embarrassingly close already, he wouldn't last three seconds.

The table creaked alarmingly and more stuff toppled off, gauze and scissors, dressing wrappers fluttering down with a soft swish. They were gonna break the damn thing. He snuck his palms under the kid's ass and lifted him easily off the surface. Seth's mouth left his nipple with a with a painful scrape of the teeth, arms flailing to grab on to Dean's neck, ankles locking against the small of Dean's back. Then he chuckled softly into Dean's neck, tongue sneaking out to lick a burning hot stripe from the collar bone to Dean's jaw.

They landed heavily on the couch against the far wall, Dean pushing him blindly into the cushions, finding his mouth again, fighting with his jeans and zipper and boxers and so many goddamned fucking layers that he wanted to scream. His fingers finally wrapped around Seth's cock, slippery with pre-come and fuck, even that part of him was fucking beautiful, long and cut, curving upwards slightly, perfect in every fucking way.

"Fuck," Seth gasped, hips rocking into Dean's hand, "oh, fuck--"

His thigh was trapped in between Dean's legs, grinding against him and in order to free himself from the fucking jeans, Dean would have to lift off the kid, he'd have to let go of him and there was no fucking way in hell he was going to do that. He twisted his wrist, hand tightening around Seth's cock, thumb brushing under the head, gathering more pre-come.

"Fuck," he growled Seth's own word back to him, "so fucking hot baby."

"Please," Seth whined, "please, I want-- I want--"

"Anything," Dean muttered against his lips, "anything you want, anything."

And he fucking meant it. At that moment he would have done anything, given anything for this fucking kid, for his long legs and smooth skin and swollen lips and his panting breath against Dean's mouth. He would take that beautiful cock in his mouth in a heartbeat. He would let the kid ride him until he couldn't walk for a week. Anything. Things he'd never willingly done for anyone. His heart on a fucking platter if Seth wanted.

Seth's hands groped at Dean's jeans and Dean almost lost it when the kid's hand pressed against him, his palm hot even through two layers.

"Want you-- wanna feel you--"

Lifting slightly, Dean frantically attacked the top button of his jeans with one hand like some complicated puzzle, refusing to let go of Seth, trying to keep the steady rhythm of his fist around the kid's cock. Seth fumbled with him and they both seemed to have turned stupid with need because it was taking forever, the zipper was getting stuck, their hands were slippery with sweat and Seth's pre-come. Then Seth was finally pushing his pants down and Dean surged forward, letting go of Seth's cock only long enough to wrap his hand around both. Seth moaned, a deep throaty sound bordering on painful and Dean sunk his teeth in the kid's shoulder to stop himself from doing the same. He thrust against him furiously, mindlessly, feeling like he's gonna fall apart, like he's gonna self-combust, sure his fingers were leaving bruises on Seth's thigh, sure Seth was scraping layers of skin off his back with his nails, wanting to come so fucking bad and never wanting it to end.

"Fuck," Seth whimpered in his ear, "so close--"

Suddenly nothing mattered more than Seth coming before he did, staying conscious enough to see it, to hear it happen, to feel him spilling all over Dean's hand and cock and stomach.

He lifted his head from Seth's shoulder, not noticing the imprints his teeth had left, the spot already bruising. Seth's head was thrown back, his mouth slick and parted, his eyes closed and the lashes wet, his throat working as if trying to swallow the moans and not succeeding. And instead of attacking like he wanted to, instead of pushing his tongue in to search for Seth's, he barely brushed against his mouth, hovering just beyond reach, licking the bottom lip gently, moving back when Seth tried to chase after him.

"So beautiful baby," he whispered, "so fucking beautiful."

Seth mewled against his mouth, hips stuttering, arching off the couch. His hand found the back of Dean's neck and yanked his head down, their lips mashing together, his cock pulsing in Deans hand, his whole body shuddering. Hot come splattered in between them and Seth mewled again, still moving, riding through the climax. Then the fucking world just went white, Dean's orgasm ripping through him without a warning, like a fucking tidal wave closing over his head, slamming him against a cliff. Later he would think that this was how people fucking died from heart attacks, that he finally understood how some old fucks managed to keel over before they were even done. But right then and there he couldn't think, he could barely breathe. He could feel Seth's lips moving against his ear, his hand cupping the back of Dean's head as if making sure that Dean knew someone was holding on to him, that he wouldn't come back down alone.

--

Only their shoulders were touching.

For a little while there, they had stayed entwined and Seth would've been happy to never fucking move again, to stay pressed against Dean until they were stuck to each other. But then Dean had moved away, as far as the narrow couch would let him. He'd made no move to get up or grab his clothes but it was obvious that he needed distance. And that fucking hurt.

That had been the clumsiest, hottest goddamned sex of Seth's life. Not that he had much to compare it to. And maybe he was still naive, but he'd always thought that somewhere out there there would be that one person that would make him lose his mind. That one person he could do anything with, without ever feeling ashamed or anxious. As it turns out he was half right. Because he had lost his mind. And now he felt anxious and ashamed and unsure of everything.

He turned his head and studied the line of Dean's throat, the freckles across his cheeks, the faint laugh lines around his eyes. Was he in love? Was he fucking in love with the crazy guy he met two days ago?

No. No, Dean was right. Seth was definitely the crazy one here. But it fucking hurt to look at him. It hurt not to be wrapped around him right now.

"You were right," he said.

Dean blinked and turned his head to look at him, his eyes carefully blank,  
"About what?"

"About me. About my life."

God, this would be so much easier if he could hide his face in Dean's shoulder, if he didn't have those green eyes studying him carefully, making him feel all clumsy and stupid.

"In my world you grow up, you go to school, you become a doctor like your dad, you date the nice fucking guy your mom invites to a dinner party who's also in pre-med and everything is orderly and all problems get patched up. And it's one long washed out movie where everyone knows the ending. It's empty and it's predictable and it's wrong. It's always, always felt wrong, like I'm living someone else's life."

He closed his eyes and found that the rest could come out easier like this,  
"I didn't quit med school to spite my dad. I quit because it wasn't me. Because I've never fucking belonged anywhere except in the back of that ambulance. The only time I feel right, I feel like myself, is when I'm saving people, when I'm covered in blood up to my elbows, when I'm stitching someone up or breathing life into them or pushing their broken pieces back together. And I don't know what that makes me, ok? I don't. Maybe I'm just a spoiled fucking brat. Maybe I'm fucked up. But I'm only alive when I'm out there in the dirt and the filth with bleeders and screamers and the dead. And now here, with you."

He took a deep, painful breath, wishing his voice would stop shaking,  
"And yeah, half the time I'm terrified of you and I don't even know why. And I don't-- I don't know why-- I don't know anything except that I'm here cause I wanna be. Not because I feel bad for you and not because my life isn't exciting enough. Because it feels right, because last night-- last night on the thruway. Just driving, not really sure where I was going, not sure what would happen when I got there, with you in the car, it felt like I'd done it a million times before, like I was home."

Hysterical laughter squeezed his throat and he shook his head,  
"And I know it's crazy. God, I'm listening to myself and I sound crazy--"

He cut off because he felt Dean's weight shift and he was suddenly terrified that he'd said too much, that Dean didn't want anything to do with the buckets of insanity that had just spilled out of his mouth.

Instead Dean's lips brushed the side of his mouth, his arms wrapping around Seth and pulling him over. Seth shifted closer, wishing he didn't feel so desperate as he practically crawled on top of him, hiding his face against Dean's shoulder. His chest felt so tight that he could barely breathe, an unfamiliar mix of happiness and an unbearably painful ache like nothing he'd felt before. And he was still afraid. Even as Dean's hand gently smoothed his hair back, thumb brushing over his cheek, he was still terrified. Except that he wasn't afraid of Dean any more. He was afraid for both of them.

Chapter Management

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Chapter 10: And then there was pain

## Chapter Text

Two days.

He had two days that felt like summer in the middle of winter, like those grade school vacations when everything was bright and new and every morning was a beginning of a new adventure. Two days in a cabin of a man who had only ever been little more than a stranger, in the middle of thirteen acres of forest, the world at standstill. Time didn't matter. The clock ticked off the hours for the next dose of pills, but aside from that, it was ignored by both of them. They ate when they were hungry, slept when they were tired, entwined on the couch, in the bedrooms, on the floor in front of the stove, warmed by the flames. It was painfully easy to just let go of everything unconnected to here and now, to simply sweep all the past years of his life under the rug and forget. The faint pang of guilt he only felt in the early hours of the morning could never hold up against the feel of Dean's body pressing against his, Dean's deep breath brushing the back of his neck, one strong arm locked around his stomach as if protecting him even in his dreams. It seemed so far away with Dean holding on to him, that past life he used to live. The rush of the job, sleepless nights, blood and pain and torn flesh. He'd thought himself incapable of leading any different type of life, but he found that he could stay like this forever, in the middle of nowhere, with one man. And if Dean had asked him to forget it all together, to leave behind everything he'd ever known, to come with him, Seth wouldn't have hesitated. Not even for a moment. It was insane and terrifying and he couldn't make any sense of it. He could try and reason with himself, call it an infatuation that would eventually fade away, call it temporary insanity, call it every medical name in the book but the end result would be the same. He would drop his old life in a heartbeat, abandon it like some old broken toy that had lost its value a long time ago if it ever held any in the first place.

But Dean didn't ask. Dean didn't say much at all unless they were pressed together, moving together, hands wandering, lips seeking, clutching each other like a life preserver. Then he spoke for both of them, endearments Seth had never heard from another man in his entire life, sweet and filthy things that would have made Seth's ears burn if they were coming from anyone else. Dean had mapped him out that first night in the cabin with his hands and his mouth, finding every spot Seth had managed to hide from himself. And Seth had wanted to cry from the pure awe of it, that this is what it should feel like, that this is what it could feel like, Dean's tongue in the most secret places, worshiping the flesh with his mouth, all the while calling Seth beautiful, soft and breathless praise whispered against the inside of Seth's thigh, a scrape of teeth against his stomach, words pouring out of him like a flood.

He'd been a quivering mess, a bundle of overstimulated nerve endings, mindless and lost. Dean had reduced him to whimpering, to wordless begging, to something none of his past lovers would have recognized. He had thought back at the farm that his brush with death had made him a poet, made him see beauty and pain where there wasn't any. But the real poetry turned out to be Dean, Dean's mouth sucking bruises into his skin, Dean's hands lifting his hips off the

bed, opening him up, careful fingers coaxing pleasure where they'd only ever been discomfort. He'd come twice on those fingers alone, sheet clenched in between his teeth so he wouldn't scream, each time feeling like the world would crumble around him. The whirlwind of the following day interrupted by Dean's hand on the small of his back, Dean's breath against his ear, the cold kitchen floor under Seth's knees as he finally took the hot flesh into his mouth, surprised by his own hunger. Dean shaking like a leaf under his palms, muscles turning to water, the unwilling sounds echoing against the cathedral ceiling. Those green eyes locked on Seth's face, on his wet lips, one hand gently cupping the back of his head, letting him set his own speed, never demanding an ounce more than what Seth was willing to give. And Seth was willing to give everything he had and a few things he didn't. Even that part of Dean had tasted like leather and hot metal, salty and bitter, an untreated burn on Seth's tongue. He'd come untouched, drowning in the smell of Dean, the taste of him, ropes of muscle shivering uncontrollably in his hands, this man that had at one point put the fear of God in him falling apart, crumbling to pieces, brought to his knees by Seth's mouth.

He would never be able to describe it, to explain it. Having those eyes follow him across the cabin, Dean's hip pressed against his in front of the stove, the casual touch of fingers, a sideways smile. How could one man, still technically a stranger, feel like home he could have never imagined. A home he didn't know he'd been missing. How they fit together, like they had been shaped by the same hand, bodies aligning perfectly, mouth against mouth. Insane. He knew it was insane. Alone, in the shower, both palms pressed against the shower wall, he'd tried to focus it on one thing. The way Dean touched him. The way he looked at him. The way he kissed him. As if he could pick apart the insanity and remove it, as if by doing so he could think clearly.

But that same night, with Dean's tongue buried deep inside of him, hearing himself beg for more, all his little theories and doubts fell apart all over again. Dean carefully sliding inside of him, the burn bordering on painful, holding himself up on unsteady arms, looking like some avenging God brought down low, his gasp mixing with Seth's, his eyes widening in awe. He was fucking breathtaking. At that moment he seemed at his most vulnerable, just as lost and confused as Seth was. And Seth finally realized that Dean didn't say anything because he didn't know what to say. Because this must be just as terrifying, just as insane for him too. And at that moment, feeling so full that he could cry, wanting Dean to move and wanting him to stay still inside of him forever, Seth knew that he was lost too. He knew the reason people wrote books and poetry for love, the reason they committed crimes and murders in the name of love, the reason they moved heaven and hell for the ones they loved. And it was more terrifying than the gun barrel pressed against his neck, worse than imminent death. He'd jerked his hips down, wanting to stop feeling it, wanting to just get lost in whatever was coming without having to think.

And Dean had chuckled, leaning down to brush his lips against Seth's neck. 'Easy,' he'd whispered, 'Slow.'

Seth had wanted to say that he didn't want easy, he wanted it hard and fast and senseless, so he could lump it up with all the others, so it would be easier to forget. But he'd said nothing and Dean stayed true to his word, every thrust painfully slow, drawing the pleasure out, skin slick with sweat sliding against Seth's, moments stretching like honey. And Seth gave in with a whimper.

There were worse things in life than being so thoroughly worshiped, than feeling too much, too intensely. There were worse things than feeling so much pleasure that you could die from it.

And he was right. Because the next morning, before the sun was even fully up, everything fell apart.

--

His cell phone was ringing.

For a few seconds, Dean actually considered not answering it. The bed was warm and comfortable, Seth sprawled out over him, soft hair tickling his stomach. It seemed a crime to disturb him. The kid was probably exhausted. Dean was exhausted. But there were only a few people who had that number and every phone call was important. Sometimes, life or death important.

He untangled his limbs from Seth's carefully, trying not to wake him up. Resisted the urge to kiss the top of his head, to press his face into the kid's neck and inhale that early morning scent of Seth's skin that was already so familiar. The cabin floor was cold. The fire must have gone out sometime during the night; they had been too busy to keep an eye on it.

His clothes were in a pile on the floor and he fumbled through them, already preparing to rip Garth a new asshole for calling him over something stupid. But the phone number on the screen wasn't Garth's.

"Bobby?" he said quietly into the phone, "What's going on? Are you ok?"

"Is he still alive?"

"What? Who?"

"The kid you kidnapped. Is he still alive?"

Dean rubbed his forehead, feeling like he'd stepped out of sleep into a fucked up dream,

"Why? I don't--"

"Answer the goddamned question, Dean."

Dean glanced over at the bed and Seth shifted under his gaze, still asleep but not for long. Chest rising and falling, long legs stretched out under the blankets.



"Of course he's alive, why-"  
"Is he still with you?"

There was something off about Bobby's voice that Dean couldn't put his finger on.  
"Yeah. He's still with me."

There was a sigh on the other end, suspiciously sounding like relief,  
"Good. He's safe then."  
"Of course he's safe Bobby, what did you think I was gonna do to him?"  
"You need to get him back to his parents. Now."

Seth was awake, arm stretching out across the bed even though his eyes were still closed, as if looking for something.

He was looking for Dean.

Suddenly Dean wished he'd kept himself within reach, that he'd never gotten up and answered the phone.

"I don't understand-"  
"You're not supposed to understand. Get him back to his parents and get as far away from him as possible. Quickly."

There was a curious sort of pain unfolding in Dean's stomach, like getting punched in slow motion. He watched Seth stretch, open his eyes, look around the room. When he saw Dean standing next to the window he smiled softly, face flushed from sleep, hair disheveled.

Dean's hand tightened around the phone,  
"Bobby, what's going on?"

"Decades of hard work, lives of good men wasted, everything ruined in ten minutes of your stupidity, that's what's going on. Don't ask me stupid questions, just do as I say. Now, Dean."

He was angry. That was the tone Dean couldn't recognize. Bobby was furious.

Seth was sitting up now, not smiling any more, his eyes wide and cautious. Dean turned away so he wouldn't have to look at him. This wasn't happening. It was ridiculous, it made no sense, it can't be happening.

"Bobby, you don't unders--"  
"Dean, you're like a son to me, your daddy was family, but don't push me."  
"What? What are you gonna do?"

"I've got two men in Snow Shoe already, security measure. But if they don't see the Impala on its way out of town within an hour, they're gonna come in and take the boy themselves. So get your ass in gear. I want the boy back with his parents by sundown."

"Why? Tell me what's going on!"

He was surprised at his own voice. He sounded like a little kid. He could hear an echo of himself somewhere in the back of his head, saying, 'Dad, where is Sam? Where is Sammy?' Overlaying it was a different echo of Bobby telling him dad was dead, overlaid by his own hoarse denials. And in the midst of it all the pain in his stomach was growing enormous and hollow, pushing cold fingers into his chest, making it hard to breathe.

Bobby's voice came muffled as if he was rubbing a hand across his mouth and Dean could picture it happening, Bobby's elbows resting on the beat up old desk, a glass of scotch in front of him, not because he'd started drinking early but because he'd started the night before and never stopped. He could picture the tired slump of his shoulders, fingers still stained with engine oil gripping the phone, and in that moment he fucking hated him. A man he'd looked up to like a second father, at that moment Dean hated him so much that the intensity of it scared him.

"Come see me afterwards," Bobby said, "I'll tell you what I can, just-- get him home. Get away from him. Do it now Dean, for once in your damn life just do what I tell you to do."

And with a soft click he was gone.

Dean stared at the phone blankly for a few seconds, the pain spreading and spreading, the cold of it being replaced with searing hot fury.

"Dean? Is everything ok?"

He didn't even realize he'd chucked the phone until it hit the wall and shattered, plastic ricocheting off the plaster, the sound of it sharp and savage in the silence. Instantly he wished he hadn't done it. Seth hadn't moved an inch but every part of him was suddenly on alert, all muscles noticeably tensing. He looked like a startled animal, caught between the urge to run and the urge to fight. He looked fucking sinful in the early morning light, bruises Dean had sucked into his skin blooming across his neck and collar bones, his lips swollen.

"I'm sorry," Dean heard himself say in a voice so tight that it didn't even sound like his own, "I need a minute."

--

The cold air cut across his throat, choking him. It was like a slap in the face.

Everything was jumbled together and nothing made sense. The idea that he might be in danger from Seth was ridiculous. If Seth was something other than human, Dean would have known right away, would have been able to tell. He was just a kid. Smart, quick on his feet, reflexes of a hunter, but still just a kid. A son of some doctor Dean had never heard of. Living in a city among thousands of other people, one of the hundreds of First Responders working for one of the dozens of hospitals. If he was someone important, someone that needed to be protected like Missouri or Pamela, he would have known. Bobby would have told him. Right?

The idea that Seth needed to stay away from Dean was just as ridiculous. If Seth was in danger, Dean couldn't think of a safer place than exactly where he is, in the middle of nowhere with Dean as his protection.

Bobby wouldn't have gotten that pissed off over some random kidnapping of some random kid. Even if it brought down all the federal departments on top of Dean. He was already on FBI's most wanted list and all they did most of the time was chase their tails in towns he'd passed through months ago. FBI was a joke. Most law enforcement agencies were a joke. Bobby didn't give a shit whether Dean was on one wanted list or five, as long as he didn't get caught. And the one time they actually did manage to arrest him in some backwoods town in Alabama, he'd gotten himself free in two hours. Bobby had laughed at him; told him he was getting rusty.

So it wasn't the fact that Dean had kidnapped some random guy. It was Seth. Seth was a part of something. Dean would bet his life that Seth was just as clueless as he was. And time was running out. He had an hour to get Seth out of here. He wasn't sure exactly who Bobby would have sent after him but Bobby knew what Dean was capable of. Out there somewhere were two seasoned hunters who might not be able to take Dean down but could put him in a world of hurt. Of course, he did have Seth. The kid might be inexperienced but he was not harmless. Put a gun in his hands and Dean would trust him with his life.

And then what? Keep running? Hope Bobby doesn't send two more, three more after them? Dean could run from cops his entire life and never break a sweat but running from hunters was a different ball game, one he would probably lose.

Oh, but it fucking hurt. It felt like being ripped open, like getting his skin peeled off slowly. He might have known all along that Seth couldn't stay, that Dean couldn't keep him. That he would have to go back to his old life eventually. But he thought there would be time to figure stuff out, to find some way to stay in contact. Somewhere deep inside he'd even hoped that Seth would want to stay with him. It was a stupid, silly hope but it had still seemed like a possibility up until now. Now it didn't matter what Seth wanted. It didn't matter what Dean wanted. Time was running out and they had to move.

--

He found Seth on his knees in front of the stove, getting the fire started, jeans hanging low and loose on his hips. Shirtless. Every bruise, every imprint of Dean's mouth clearly visible. His mind flashed to the previous morning, Seth on his knees in front of him, lips wrapped around his cock, looking up at Dean with those green and gold eyes the entire time. Taking him in so deep that Dean could feel the back of Seth's throat closing around him, moaning around him, holding on tightly when Dean tried pushing him away. Tears trembling on those ridiculously long eyelashes, barely breathing from the effort to take it all, to give everything he could. And afterwards, when they were both on their knees, finding the damp spot on Seth's jeans, realizing the kid had come without touching himself. It had been too fucking much.

The whole thing was too much, too fast, too fucking good. Dean should have known that he couldn't have this. This one fucking thing he'd actually wanted for himself. He should have learned that goddamned lesson years ago but he guessed that he was just too fucking dumb for those lessons. How did that thing go, the example of psychotic behavior? Doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result. That was his problem. He kept leading the same fucked up empty life and expecting something good to come out of it.

Seth straightened up and Dean was relieved the kid didn't try and come closer, didn't try touching him. There was only so much he could take right now.

"I'm taking you back home."

Seth blinked at him like he didn't understand. For a few long moments, nothing was said. Dean couldn't make himself repeat it and Seth just looked blank. Finally, he reached over for the arm of the chair where he'd changed Dean's dressings what seemed to be a lifetime ago, and slowly sat down, as if his knees had decided to just give up. He opened his mouth and closed it, cleared his throat.

"Why?"

And that was the million dollar question, wasn't it? Dean didn't know the answer. Not yet anyway.

But he couldn't say that, he couldn't even begin to explain something he barely understood himself. What he didn't want to do is mention Bobby's threat or the other hunters. He didn't want to have that conversation. He didn't want to have any conversation now that he knew Seth would soon be gone. Every moment of talking to him, looking at him, in the same room with him was making it all worse, it was making him fucking angry again, it was making him furious. There was a bitter, sour taste in the back of his throat and with every passing moment it was growing larger, it was threatening to spill over.

"Because if I don't, we're both gonna be in some deep shit. Soon."

"Cops? FBI?"

"Among other things."

"How do you know? Did someone call and warn you?"

"Yeah. I guess you could say that. We gotta go though and we gotta go now."

"But why-- why can't you just-- take me with you?"

Dean wanted to scream, he wanted to fucking break something.

"Because they're looking for you. Every fucking law enforcement agency out there is looking for a poor kidnapped kid and the bad guy who did it. Because your picture is probably on every tv station, on the covers of newspapers, being plastered on small town bulletin boards. Because I couldn't make it a hundred miles with you in the car without getting arrested."

He rubbed a hand over his face so he didn't have to look at Seth, didn't have to see that fucking expression on his face as if Dean had fucking kicked him, as if he'd slapped him.

"Listen," he said calmly, "you had to know that you couldn't stay, that this-- wasn't gonna work like this. Did you think your parents would stop looking for you after a few days? That the cops would give up? That we could hide out here forever? You had to know it was just a matter of time before--"

"Stop," Seth said softly and Dean closed his mouth, swallowing whatever else he was gonna say, feeling like he'd run for miles, knowing he would go to hell for this.

And if Seth had looked hurt at that moment, if he'd looked to be in as much pain as Dean felt, if his voice had quivered... Dean would have said fuck it to everything. Would have taken those two hunters out on his own, would have committed himself to running with Seth at his side for the rest of his life, no matter how short it turned out to be. He would have burned his way across the fucking country for this fucking kid.

But Seth stood up slowly, without meeting his eyes, and when he spoke his voice was calm. Calm and cool.

"We need to leave right now?"

"Yes."

"Give me fifteen minutes."

Chapter Management

Edit Chapter Delete Chapter

Chapter 11: Breathe

Chapter Text

The kid was ready in five. Dean wasn't.

Sweeping the place clean turned out to be harder than he thought. During the two days they spent in the cabin, Dean had been unconsciously cleaning up after himself, wiping things down, making sure not to let his hands linger anywhere where he could be leaving prints. It was an old

habit, erasing his presence moment by moment. Seth, on the other hand, had left traces of himself everywhere. A damp towel on the bathroom floor, discarded pajama pants next to the bed, coffee cups left next to the stove, next to the window, in the kitchen. They were small things and somehow personal. And each one was harder than the next. The scent of Seth in the bathroom, the rumpled bed sheets, Seth's fingerprints on the headboard, million and one details he didn't want to erase.

Seth waited by the door, the first response bag clutched tightly in one hand, like a life preserver. He didn't offer to help and Dean didn't ask. He was glad for the silence and the deliberately blank expression on Seth's face. It made the whole thing a little easier to bear.

Then he was finally ready to go, the single handgun he always carried a comforting weight in the back of his belt, the pieces of the shattered cell phone in his jacket pocket. He would chuck them out the car window once they were speeding down the highway and call Bobby to let him know that particular line was down for good. Those were the only two things he'd carried in from the car because he'd never planned on staying this long. He'd never thought himself capable of forgetting that he was Dean Winchester, hunter, wanted, alone in the world. But it had been so easy to forget with Seth. So easy to pretend that he was normal, maybe even loved.

In the other pocket was the bottle of antibiotics he was supposed to keep taking. Seth had pressed the bottle into his hand with a quiet admonition to keep taking them every six hours. And for some reason that had been the worst part. The fact that Seth had every right to be angry, every reason to hate Dean now, but instead, the only words he'd spoken in the last twenty minutes were to remind Dean to take care of himself. And Dean couldn't even thank him because he was afraid to open his mouth. He was afraid of what would come out.

Seth stepped outside first and Dean couldn't resist one last glance at the inside of the cabin, now that he knew Seth wasn't watching. Because he wanted to remember it. He wanted to remember it so badly. He would probably never be as happy as he'd been for the past two days and that was okay. He seriously doubted that he deserved more than what he'd already gotten. But he never wanted to forget even the smallest detail, Seth's quiet chuckle as Dean carried him across the cabin, his warm palm on the back of Dean's neck, his forehead resting against Dean's shoulder. He wanted to keep those memories until his dying day.

Seth was already half way to the car, the bag hanging off his shoulder. The sun had come up but the cabin was still in the shade, the surrounding trees arching overhead. Between the sight of the determined set of Seth's shoulders and the mess in Dean's head, it took him a few seconds to notice that something was off.

But when he did, it was so obvious that he cursed himself for not noticing it the moment they stepped outside.

It was silent. Unnaturally silent. No birds, no squirrels, not a thing moving among the trees. The hairs on the back of his neck stood up. A warning tingle shot through his fingers, his spine. The ground in front of the cabin looked undisturbed, the nearest trees and bushes untouched. No broken branches, no tracks, not even a leaf out of its natural place.

His chest constricted.

"Seth," he said as loudly as he dared, and Seth stopped in mid step, turning around slowly.

"Get back in the cabin."

Seth stood completely still for a few seconds, which in Dean's panicking mind stretched into years, into decades, his whole body screaming out a warning. He could hear it now too, a soft, far away rustle that was not wind, along with a faint, lingering stench in the air like a match recently put out. Seth was moving, walking back towards Dean, his eyes wide. Could he feel it too? Probably not, but he knew something was wrong, his posture had changed, his gait had become sleeker, his steps more grounded, his shoulders tense as if expecting an attack. Dean had moved to meet him without realizing he'd done so, his hand curving over Seth's elbow protectively, tugging him towards the door.

"What is it?"

"Inside. Find salt. Don't ask questions, just make salt lines at all the entrances, doors, windows, every place where something could get in. Quickly."

"Come inside with me," Seth said softly, eyes darting between Dean and the expanse of the forest behind him where there was nothing to see yet.

Dean knew there would be nothing. There would be nothing until there was something and then it would be too late.

"I have to grab something from the car. Go. Just go, I'll be right behind you."

Seth disappeared inside and Dean ran for the car. Every goddamned weapon he owned except for the useless handgun was in the trunk. Stupid. Stupid. He'd dropped his guard, thought they were safe, it never occurred to him that something could track them this far. And it was a definite something. Not a vampire or a similar kind of critter, but something bigger. Something that left no tracks, left no traces of itself aside from that faint smell he almost missed entirely. Something that could make the entire forest fall silent by its presence alone. Something he was too fucking afraid to think about, because compared to the big bads out there, Dean Winchester had only hunted small fish so far.

He had the trunk open when he felt it, a distinct change of air behind him, the stench growing stronger. He grabbed the first heavy weapon he could get his hands on and turned, ready to shoot.

It was a girl. Whatever it was, it looked like a girl, small and blonde with one of those boyish hair cuts, a face that was tiny and almost delicate. Maybe a hundred pounds soaking wet, and if Dean's instinct was anything to go by, more dangerous than all the fucking things he'd ever killed. So he shot her. Double barrel salt load right in the middle of her fucking chest.

The shot echoed through the trees, bounced off the cabin and redoubled, sounding incredibly loud in the silence. Birds screeched in complaint, a flock rising from the nearby tree and disappearing into the forest.

She stumbled back, the wound in her chest smoking. Dean began to reload quickly and methodically, his hands steady even though that first shot told him everything he needed to know. Reloading was pointless. Shooting her was pointless. Whatever she was, he was not equipped to take it down. All he'd done was make her angry. All he was doing now is buying time so Seth can ward the cabin.

When she knocked the shotgun out of his hand like it was a toy, he swung out, actually managing to push her back a few steps with the force of his blows. Her one blow sent him flying into the open trunk of the Impala, the backs of his knees striking it with so much force that both of his legs gave out. Gravel dug into his palms as he tried to struggle to his feet. Half a minute? Could he buy another half a minute?

He pulled out the handgun and shot her once in the upper thigh. She didn't even stumble.

Her fingers wrapped around his neck and she lifted him up, one handed, coal black eyes studying him carefully.

He amended the list of things he knew. He was not equipped to take her down because she was a goddamned demon, the first one he'd ever come across. And he would very likely die.

When the bone in his arm snapped, he screamed.

--

"Come out come out little one! I can hear you breathing!"

The singsong voice drifted up from downstairs and Seth closed his eyes briefly, taking in a deep breath. He'd searched all the obvious places for a weapon and found nothing. Not a fucking thing. Whatever the salt lines were supposed to do wasn't working. Whatever Dean did outside obviously hadn't worked either. Seth was a good shot but he'd never ventured past the basic



handguns. Although if he had to bet his life on it, he'd say that had been a shotgun blast. And if the shotgun had done no damage to whatever was downstairs, then there was no point in searching for a weapon, no point in trying to call for help, no point in anything.

Dean was alive. Seth had heard him growl when they entered the cabin, him and whatever that thing was. It sounded like a girl, but then again, the vampires had looked like normal men. Was he hurt? Seth was afraid to find out. He knew he had to move but his legs seemed locked in place, refusing to budge. He'd heard of being frozen in fear but he'd never experienced it before. Until now.

"Don't be shy, we just wanna play! Don't we?"

Dean's answering groan got him moving. It sounded like he was hurt. Seth had to do something. What the fuck could he possibly do?

The stairs creaked under his feet, his heart beating loudly in his ears, his palms now slick with sweat and freezing cold. He forced himself to keep breathing. In and out. Calm. Whatever happened, he had to stay calm. There had to be some kind of a way out of this but he had no chance of figuring it out if he started panicking. It would help if he knew what he was up against. Why hadn't he asked Dean about other things he hunted? Two days together, pretty much glued at each other's side, and he'd never asked Dean about hunting, about all the things that go bump in the night. Too late now. All he could do now is breathe and keep a clear head.

Yet when he saw them, Dean and whatever that thing this was, he stumbled over the last step. Grabbed the rail and dug his nails into it. Stopped breathing all together.

Dean's face was covered in blood. He was on his knees next to a girl who looked barely an inch over five feet, a skinny little thing with a bad bleach job. That's all he noticed about her. Because Dean was fucking hurt. Dean was fucking hurt.

"Ah, there you are!" she tilted her head at him and smiled,  
"You're a pretty thing. I did picture you... bigger. A little more impressive, you know? Not that it matters what you look like."

Seth wasn't listening.

Head laceration. It was a head laceration and they always bled a lot so it could be nothing serious. But he couldn't be sure unless he got closer. The unnatural way Dean held his upper body meant some severe bruising over the rib cage or possible fractures or maybe both. Right ulna broken. The forearm was already starting to swell. The bone hadn't punctured the skin but the break looked pretty bad. What else? There could be a dozen more injuries hidden from the view. Dean met his eyes and that was suddenly worse than all of it put together. Dean Winchester, the man who hunted monsters, the man who had singlehandedly beheaded four

vampires and managed to effortlessly evade FBI for years, looked fucking terrified. Seth would have never been able to picture it. He wouldn't have thought it was possible.

Seth finally focused on her, it, whatever the fuck it was, and saw no iris, no pupil, just a pool of black under the eyelids. He wished he knew what that meant. He wished he knew what that made her, how to hurt her.

"What do you want?" he ground out, proud that his voice didn't shake.

"Not a damn thing," she said lightly,

"I wanted to see you, see how you were getting on, what a strapping young man you grew up to be. Daddy would be so proud."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"No, you wouldn't. Tucked away all these years, hiding in plain sight. But I think you'll find out soon."

Her fingers absently caressed the top of Dean's head and Seth felt his stomach turn. She was talking fucking nonsense.

"You're here because of me?"

"Of course. You think I'd go through all this trouble for a piddling little hunter?" she grinned,

"Although I think he might turn into a bonus."

"Ok," he said carefully, "but if you want me, you're gonna have to let him go."

"No," Dean snapped, good arm coming up to wrap around her knees, attempting to throw her off balance.

It almost worked. Almost. Her hand found Dean's collar bone and dug into it with a sickening crack. Dean screamed hoarsely. It was the worst sound in the world. It was worse than the sound of all the ribs he'd fractured trying to give CPR, all the bodies he'd scraped off the asphalt, all the bones he'd had to break and reset, all the screams of pain he'd heard over the years.

It was the sound of world cracking.

Seth felt heat envelop him. Starting somewhere in the back of his throat where his own scream was trying to build, it spread quickly, sinking its hot fingers into his brain. It felt like standing in the middle of a fire, flames licking his face, making their way into his nose, his mouth, igniting his lungs. It burned across his skin like wildfire, a current of energy thrumming through his veins. Fear stuttered. Fury enveloped him. He was going to explode. He was going to self-combust.

"Let him go."

"Oh, but he sounds so sexy when he's in pain. Look at that pretty face. Look at that mouth! It was made for bruises."

"Let him go."

“No, I think--” she grabbed the hair at the back of Dean’s head, “I think I wanna play some more.”

Seth’s hands went up on their own. Later he would think that he’d raised them as a gesture for her to stop or something equally pointless. But the fact was, he wasn’t really thinking. He wasn’t capable of stringing two conscious thoughts together. He just needed her to stop. And his hands were the only part of him that didn’t feel engulfed in flames, that wasn’t searing. His hands were cool. And they seemed to release all that built up heat in one enormous blast, like the world’s most powerful and fucked up flame thrower.

Her eyes flickered in surprise, then she was flying backwards as if pulled by some invisible force, her back hitting the window and shattering it. Seth wanted to howl. He was fucking burning, his eyes were watering, his throat pulsing in fury. The heat just kept pouring out and it felt like dying, it felt like flying, it felt like Dean’s mouth on him had felt, so fucking powerful and beautiful and wild. The window frame creaked and burst outward, the wall surrounding it cracked, the table and chair flew across the floor and slammed against it, the newspapers Seth had been using to start a fire forming a furious cyclone, a small tornado in the middle of the floor. The couch scraped across the floor, picture frames were ripped off the wall, the entire foundation of the cabin quivered and shook under his feet. It went on until he was sure he was screaming, until he was sure it would kill him.

Then it stopped. The flow cut off so suddenly that his knees buckled and he slipped to one knee, head swimming. Nausea flooded him. He was gonna throw up again. Somewhere in the back of his head a small voice wondered how many times he’d thrown up since meeting Dean Winchester. Definitely one too many.

The newspapers slowly fluttered to the floor. The table clattered down, then promptly broke in two pieces. Something warm trickled down to Seth’s lip and he wiped at it absently. He couldn’t look away from the hole where the window was. Beyond it, the green of the trees seemed visually overwhelming, entirely too bright. A spike of pain shot through his eyes. He couldn’t tell if the cabin was now deathly silent or if his hearing was gone for good. Maybe he was dead. Maybe whatever had just happened killed him.

“Seth?”

Dean. Good. He could hear.

He felt fingers touch his arm. Turned his head to meet Dean’s shocked gaze, his face still covered in blood, one hand awkwardly pressed against his stomach. Another spike of pain shot through Seth’s eyes and he grimaced. His lip tickled and he wiped at it again, looking down to find a streak of bright red blood coating his hand.

“Dean?” he said in a small voice, wondering how he could even speak.

Why wasn't he completely hoarse? Hadn't he been screaming?

"What did you do?" Dean asked, his voice hushed.

Seth looked at the hole again, the broken table, the curtains torn as if some wild beast had clawed at them, the cracks fanning over the beams. His hands were starting to shake. His stomach turned violently, flooding his mouth in saliva. Terror was uncoiling in there, starting in the very pit and folding outward through his lungs, his chest.

"I don't-- I wanted-- her to stop."

She'd said she had come to see him. She'd said that he'd been hiding in plain sight all this time. That daddy would be proud. His entire body was shaking now, goosebumps covering him from head to toe, his teeth starting to chatter. What did that mean? What did he do? Another spike of pain, this one in his temple, made him gasp loudly. What had just happened?

Dean's hand found his face, his neck. It was so warm Seth wanted to cry.

"Ok, ok, let's not... let's not freak out."

"You think-- you think I'm like her? Jesus Dean, am I like her?? Am I a monster?"

"No. No."

"Then how did I do that, huh?! How did I do that if I'm not--"

"It doesn't matter right now. It doesn't matter."

Dean was pulling him forward, the hand on the back of his neck insistent until their foreheads were touching and Seth could breathe him in, familiar and comforting.

Dean. Breathing in and out. Chest rising and falling. Dean.

"It doesn't matter," Dean whispered, "we'll figure out. But we should go before she comes back. Ok? Hey, look at me."

Deja vu. He focused on Dean, the blood on his face, faint lines of pain etched around his mouth. Green eyes ringed in gold. Freckles noticeable even under the smear of blood. Calm. Dean was not afraid any more. Dean was not afraid of him. A few minutes ago he'd been terrified but now he wasn't and it made no sense.

"You won't hurt me," Dean said as if reading his mind, "I know you won't. But she'll try again. We have to go before she comes back. Ok? Can we do that?"

--

They stumbled outside, Seth's legs still barely holding him up and Dean moving like his bones were full of shattered glass, like every muscle in his body was torn. She was nowhere to be seen. It was too much to hope that she was dead; probably just as freaked out as Seth was.

Seth had managed to freak out something that had brought Dean Winchester to his knees. Something that a shotgun blast didn't even slow down.

A handgun lay on the ground next to the car. Dean bent over slowly and picked it up, hissing as he straightened.

"You'll have to drive," he said.

Seth nodded and crawled into the driver's seat. It took him two tries to get the key into the ignition. His foot shook on the gas as he tried to back out, then jerked on the brake pedal when he stopped to shift into drive. The steering wheel was already slippery from the death grip of his sweaty palms.

"Breathe," Dean said softly, "just breathe, ok?"

Seth gulped air and tried to steady his foot. Then they were driving away from the cabin, gravel flying. He glanced up at the review mirror and wished he hadn't. There was a fucking hole in the side of the cabin where the window used to be. A giant fucking hole. He'd done that.

The main road was deserted and that turned out to be a very good thing because Seth was having a hell of a time keeping the car in between two lanes. He wiped at his mouth again, knowing there was more blood without looking at it.

"I can't lift my arm," Dean said calmly.

"She broke your clavicle I think," Seth said, "and your forearm. We need to stop somewhere safe because I need to look at it. If we're lucky, nothing is severely out of place in there."

His voice was still shaking and he didn't know how to make it stop. What were they gonna do if the bones needed to be realigned? What if Dean's ulna wasn't just a clean break? What if it was all shattered in there?

He slammed both hands against the steering wheel,

"Shit. Shit. My bag. I left my bag at the cabin."

"It's ok, we'll just-- we'll steal more stuff."

"Where? We're in the middle of goddamned nowhere in the middle of the fucking day."

"I'll rob a place at a gunpoint if I have to. We're not going back there."

"The pain pills, the bandages, it was all fucking in there."

"It's ok Seth."

"It's not ok. Jesus, nothing is fucking ok!"

"Stop the car."

"What?"

"Just stop the car."

Seth skidded over onto the shoulder, raising a cloud of dust. Before he'd even managed to put the car in park, Dean was pulling him over with his good hand, wrapping an arm around him. Seth buried his face in Dean's neck, his breath coming too fast, his heart beating so hard it was almost painful. His fingers gripped Dean's jacket so tightly that his hands cramped.

"Breathe," Dean whispered, "breathe."

His lips brushed Seth's temple, his ear. Seth tried. He inhaled the leather and metal over and over again until he was nearly lightheaded with it. Fought the urge to crawl into Dean's lap like a little kid. Kept breathing in Dean's skin, his forehead pressed against the pulse in Dean's throat, thumping softly. He tried to match his breaths to the beat. Thud - inhale. Thud - exhale. Dean's fingernails scraped over his scalp lightly, raising tingles along his spine. Inhale. Exhale.

After a count of thirty he could finally speak.

"I'm afraid," he whispered, nearly choking on the words.

"I know," Dean said, his breath warm against Seth's cheek, "I know. But we're ok. We're alive. We're gonna figure the rest out, ok? Everything's gonna be fine."

Seth lifted his head without easing his death grip on Dean's jacket,

"But what if--"

"No what if. We're alive. That's all that matters," his hand cupped Seth's cheek,

"We need to go. Can you drive? I can do it one handed."

"No," Seth shook his head, "I can. I can drive."

He made himself let go of Dean and pull back. His hand were still shaking, but his heart had stopped trying to beat its way out of his chest.

"Shit," Dean hissed.

"What?"

"Stay in the car."

"What? Why--"

Dean was already out of the car and he was running, he was fucking running with his arm clutched to his stomach. Seth stumbled out after him and saw a truck grill peaking out in between the bushes on the other side of the road. There had been a dirt road there at some point, leading to god knows where, but it was overgrown and well hidden. Someone had tucked the truck in between the trees and bushes where you could not see it unless you knew what you were looking for.

Obviously Dean had, because he crashed through the growth, slipping in the dirt and nearly falling down. Then he stopped suddenly, freezing in place.

"Fuck," Seth heard him mutter, "Fuck."

Seth skidded to a stop a few feet away.

He had thought the truck was red. It had looked red. Except there was a few spots where it wasn't.

He moved closer and Dean grabbed his arm,  
"Don't. Don't, there's no point."

An overpowering stench of copper assaulted his nostrils. There was a body, on the ground, next to the drivers side. A man, older by the looks of the gray streaks in his black hair. That was all Seth could tell about him. His face was completely gone, his chest torn open, one of his legs missing. Further on, near the rear tire, there was a pile of something. Seth wasn't sure what, but he had a strong suspicion that used to be a man too. One that had been torn to pieces.

The truck wasn't red. It was coated in blood.

"We have to go," Dean said, his voice unsteady.

Seth gently pried his hand off.

He moved towards the first body but it felt like he was floating, his legs numb, his chest rebelling at the scent of so much blood. Even on his worst work days, in the worst accidents, he'd never seen such a massacre in one place. His fingers found the place where the carotid pulse should be. The skin was cool and clammy but it gave slightly under the touch. Couple of hours. No longer than five. He could hear Dean breathing heavily behind him.

He's not sure how they made it back to the car. But he knew that the numbness he felt was an overload. All systems shut down, autopilot engaged. Hello lizard brain. Breathe in and out, put the car in drive, pull out slowly.

"That was Rufus," Dean whispered, "that was Rufus, he taught me everything I know about vampires, he gave me my first handgun, Jesus fuck."

Seth said nothing.

Chapter Management

Edit Chapter Delete Chapter  
Chapter 12: Cat paws

Chapter Text

They drove in silence. Out of the town, on the thruway, through Pennsylvania. Dean didn't complain. No matter what he'd said out loud, the fact was, he had no energy to rob a pharmacy. He wasn't even sure he could stand up long enough to rob a gas station. He'd gotten quite a

few beatings over the years, but he's never felt so shattered before. And fucking helpless. He's never felt so helpless in his entire fucking life. Not even when dad was killed.

He studied Seth's profile for a while. The kid seemed to have checked out again. His mouth and chin were still smeared with blood but at least his hands on the steering wheel were steady and he didn't look like he was gonna freak out any time soon. That was a good thing because Dean might have offered to drive, but that had been a lie too. Just sitting and not moving fucking hurt. Breathing hurt. He should be calling Bobby right now but he couldn't bring himself to do it. How much had Bobby hid from Dean? Enough to make him angry. Enough to blame him for Rufus's death.

And Rufus might have been there to pressure Dean to take Seth back home, but Rufus would've never harmed a hair on either of their heads. Because it was Rufus. Dean had gotten his first driving lesson in the man's beat up old Cadillac when he was twelve. Rufus had said that John didn't want him banging up the Impala his first time behind the wheel, but that had been a lie. John was just too goddamned busy for something so unimportant like teaching his kid to drive. And Dean had always known this. But he loved the man a little bit for that white lie.

Rufus was dead. Rufus who always had the best fucking scotch stashed away and never hesitated to share, who was the only one to find Dean's jokes funny, who took him along on his first vampire hunt. Rufus who squeezed his shoulder afterwards and told him he'd done a good job. A tiny little sentence Dean had never gotten from John. Not once.

His eyelids were starting to burn. He closed his eyes and leaned his head back carefully, the whole right side of his body screaming at the movement. He didn't want to know who the other hunter was. He had enough to mourn without knowing.

"Dean?"

"Yah."

"Is that half a bottle of whiskey still in the car?"

"Under your seat."

He could hear Seth searching for it, the clang of glass against the underside of the car seat. That was actually a pretty damn good idea. There wasn't much either one of them could do now, but they could get drunk.

Seth's voice was hoarse. He'd been screaming. Towards the end, when the beams of the cabin had begun cracking, when the entire foundation started to shake, Seth had started screaming. And Dean had been sure that whatever the fuck was happening would kill him. Blood had already started pouring out of his nose, down his mouth. Dean had wanted to scream with him.

At that moment, for all Dean knew, Seth could have been right. He could be just like the demon. A strange, human offshoot, some kind of a demon mutation, or something infinitely worse. But



the entire time it was happening, Dean was only afraid of one thing. That Seth would be dead by the end of it.

He heard the bottle cap unscrewing, the liquid sloshing forward, Seth's throat working. He stretched his left hand out for the bottle without opening his eyes. If he could manage to keep his head, neck, and his entire right side completely immobile, the pain would actually be bearable. Drinking would hurt, but it's a price he was willing to pay.

"You're not supposed to be drinking and taking the pills," Seth said, but he handed the bottle over anyway.

And Dean was right, drinking did fucking hurt. The cheap whiskey burned his throat and he fought a cough, even that slight movement of his ribs causing an orchestra of pain. He passed the bottle back to Seth.

When Seth got off route 79 and took 68 instead, Dean asked no questions. It didn't really matter where they were going. They passed the bottle back and forth until it was empty; Dean could've been drinking water for all the difference it made. He was starting to consider attempting to rob a pharmacy anyway when Seth left 68 for 19, which could be considered a highway only in the loosest definition of the term, no matter what the little sign claimed.

"Where are we going?"

He supposed that it shouldn't be too surprising if the kid had another hiding place stashed away.

"I'm not sure," Seth said,

"I'll tell you when we get there."

--

Lizard brain had its benefits. Tunnel vision. The ability to deal with one thing at a time without worrying about the rest. Everything else might be bubbling under the surface, threatening to make Seth into a quivering bundle of terrified nerves, but right now, it was stashed away. Unimportant. There was a hierarchy to his madness. So.

He knew route 19 was more likely to have an assortment of tiny little towns. He was looking for a specific kind. Around fifteen hundred permanent residents. Because anything under that wouldn't be enough for what he had in mind. Anything over two thousand would have a police department large enough to be problematic. He thanked the stupidity of town signs that announced how many residents it contained. And then he thanked God or whoever was listening for Harmony, Pennsylvania. Because it was fucking perfect.

The cute little signs promising an animal hospital in just a few miles were the only sign of life. An occasional farm flashed through the trees, too removed from the main road to matter.

"I'm gonna need your gun."

Dean hesitated,

"An animal hospital? You're gonna rob an animal hospital?"

"They have everything we need. Everything from bandages to pain pills. In a town this size? There's probably no emergency button, no guard, no obstacles whatsoever. Did you see the police department?"

"Yeah. About twenty minutes back where we came from."

"Exactly. By the time someone calls them, by the time they wrap their heads around the fact that someone robbed an animal hospital, we're gonna be long gone."

He turned to look at Dean, wondering if he was missing something, if his autopilot had failed him. It had definitely sounded like a good plan in his own head.

Dean turned his head slightly, grimacing in pain. What Seth could see of his collar bone was black and purple, swollen, the crusted blood peeling off the side of his face and neck. He looked like shit and at the same time, he looked so fucking lovely.

"You should've been a hunter," Dean said, the corner of his lip lifting slightly,

"You would've made a damn good hunter."

Seth found himself blushing.

--

The 'clinic' had two entrances, both facing the parking lot. Seth parked in front of the far left one and tucked the gun into his pants.

"Do you have another gun handy?"

"Yeah."

"If someone comes out while I'm inside you might have to... scare them back in."

"Yeah, I got it."

Seth took a deep breath and grabbed the door handle, then changed his mind and stretched across the seat instead. Dean's lips yielded under his, probably more out of surprise than anything else. He tasted like blood and pain and whiskey. When Seth pulled back, Dean was smiling again.

"For good luck?"

"Just in the case I don't come back."

Dean's hand found his and clenched it tightly enough to hurt.

"Careful."

"Yeah."

Then he was in the parking lot, moving towards the far right entrance, feeling Dean's eyes burning the back of his neck. The sky above was a beautiful shade of blue, light and almost transparent, the type of sky that only happens in the early spring. There were small clusters of bushes planted around the entrance, first flowers already budding. Someone had done their spring cleaning and done it with great care, pulling up weeds and trimming the branches. The building itself looked well taken care of, white trim recently repainted, small stickers of cat paws decorating the windows.

It was the stickers that got him. Made him stop at the ramp, less than three feet away from the door.

On the children's unit, back at the hospital, they'd had the same stickers. Cat paws and dog paws and balloons. It made the unit no less depressing, but the kids seemed to like them. How did he get here? How did he go from secretly adding cat paw stickers to the ugly gray of the walls on the children's unit to the cold steel of a gun pressing into his hip bone, blood dried and crusted on his face, about to point a weapon at people who had done nothing to deserve it? How had he gone from saving people's lives to robbing an animal clinic for morphine? Animal clinic. He was about to put the fear of God into people who had dedicated their lives to helping puppies and kittens. What the fuck?

Could he really do this?

No. He couldn't.

He turned around and met Dean's gaze across the parking lot. And Dean smiled slightly, as if he knew exactly what Seth was thinking. As if he'd expected it. Suddenly Seth was sure that he could walk back to the car, get back in, tell Dean that he couldn't do it, and Dean would only nod. Would never blame him, never hold it against him, never try and pressure him into doing it anyway. Dean would grind his teeth and wait for something else to come along, never mind the broken forearm and collar bone, never mind the pain.

Dean. The fucking guy who broke a cop's skull and called it collateral damage. Who severed a vamp's head with a knife no longer than Seth's palm. Fucking Dean Winchester, FBI's most wanted, covered in freckles like some goddamned porn star.

Seth rubbed the flaking blood off his mouth and laughed softly. The world around him had gone insane so many times in the last few days that he would probably end up in a nut house because of it. Even the one thing he could be absolutely sure of, his own fucking body, had

betrayed him back at the cabin. Nothing was stable any more, nothing was normal, and he could be sure of absolutely nothing except for one little detail.

He fucking fell in love with the crazy guy.

He pulled out the gun and blew Dean a kiss.

--

The kid was inside for exactly twelve minutes. He came back out with the gun still clutched in one hand and a beige cloth sack in the other. Sprinted across the parking lot, almost fell into the drivers seat, and was peeling away before the car door was closed all the way. He was panting as if he'd ran a mile, his face pale, his fingers clenched around the steering wheel. Dean ground his teeth when the sharp turn out of the parking lot nearly tossed him into Seth's lap. All the bones on the right side of his body seemed to rearrange themselves in new and interesting positions. And by interesting he meant painful enough to make him whimper.

"Sorry," Seth said tightly, his foot on the gas jerking the car from zero to sixty in seconds, "Sorry."

"It's fine," Dean said through clenched teeth, "Are you ok?"

"Yeah. That was... I don't wanna do that again. Next time, it'll have to be a pharmacy."

"Yeah. Ok. Hopefully there won't be a next time."

"Here," he dug through the sack one handed and came out with a small plastic bottle that looked like it would hold cough syrup.

While Dean turned it around in his hand, trying to figure out what the hell could such a small bottle possibly do to help the orchestra of pain currently winding up to a crescendo, Seth passed him a long, thin syringe with no needle.

"There are milliliter measurements etched into the side of it. It's 20 mg per milliliter so two is all you can have right now. At least until I see how you react to it. Stick the syringe into the bottle, take out two milliliters of fluid and then squirt it down your throat."

It was not an easy task, doing it one handed, but he did manage to get the fluid into the syringe, about half a teaspoon worth. He squirted it down his throat and nearly gagged.

"Jesus, it tastes like shit."

"Don't be a baby."

"You could've warned me."

"Yeah, but then you wouldn't have made that face."

Dean grunted,

“Ok, now what?”

“It should kick in quickly.”

“Yeah, I figured out that much. I mean where do we go from here?”

“Ohio. Easier to hide there,” Seth echoed Dean’s own words back.

Has it only been three days since they had that conversation? Five days since he’d woken up in an ambulance? Five fucking days. It felt like years had gone by.

Seth tossed the bag in the back,

“Their medical tape has little cat paw prints all over it. I can’t wait to use it.”

--

By the time they drove into Litchfield, Ohio, Dean was passed out in the passenger seat, mouth half open and drooling slightly on his jacket. It was still early afternoon and sunny. A beautiful day actually; not a cloud in the sky, birds singing, hello fucking springtime. His mother was probably out in the garden on a day like today. Her first or second outing of the season, depending on what sort of a chaos Seth’s kidnapping had caused in her routines. For someone with a PhD in Psychology, she was surprisingly unaware of her own peculiarities. She took every single weed and broken branch as a personal affront, as if every winter only came around to cause disturbance among her precious flower beds. He missed her. The stupid straw hat she always wore, an assortment of gardening gloves, all in ridiculously cheery colors, the enormous sunglasses that always made her look like a human bumble bee. But he didn’t miss the spring clean up. No sir. He was actually happy to be nowhere near that torture session.

Except that he might never see her again. Even if he turned around and went back home right now, what the fuck was he supposed to say?

‘Hey mom, you know that guy who kidnapped me? Yeah, the crazy guy FBI is looking for. I sort of fell in love with him. And had sex with him all over your friend Melissa’s summer cabin. I also tore the cabin apart with the power of my mind and scared the fuck out of a demon. Afterwards I drove to Harmony Pennsylvania and robbed an animal clinic. For morphine. How’s the spring clean up going?’

He chuckled hysterically, then bit his lip to make it stop. Nope. Not gonna think about that. Not gonna crack up in the middle of Litchfield, Ohio. Gonna stay sane and calm. But the car was too quiet and his tunnel vision was long gone and there was nothing else to focus on.

So he reached over and nudged Dean’s good shoulder,

“We’re here.”

They weren’t of course. ‘Here’ indicated that they’d had a destination in the first place, which they didn’t. But they were somewhere, and even though Seth was still driving down some

random road, it was time to stop. Not just because his head threatened to kick into panic mode at any moment but because Dean's swelling was now bordering on grotesque.

Dean groaned, a sleepy hoarse sound that was way hotter than it should be.

"Where the fuck is 'here'?"

"Litchfield, Ohio."

"Litchfield," Dean straightened up slowly,

"How do you find these damn places I've never fucking heard of?"

He seemed to have some difficulty sitting up straight but there was no sign of pain on his face. It looked like Seth was right, two milliliters was a perfect dose.

"Well, I have this dangerous fugitive in the passenger seat so I figured maybe I should stay off the thruway."

Dean read the sign on the side of the road and snorted,

"This town is part of the Buckeye Local School District? I'll bet you hundred bucks that there's no hotel anywhere near here. We'll be lucky if there's a gas station."

"You don't have a hundred bucks. And we're not staying at a hotel."

"Then where?"

Seth was about to say that he has no fucking idea where they were staying or why they were in Litchfield in the first place, when he noticed the white sign on the side of the road, nearly obscured with weeds.

Property for sale. Thirteen acres.

He put the blinker on.

--

"I know you've squatted before."

"Not in a house that was for sale," Dean said patiently,

"What if it's been sold?"

"There would be a little sign that said it was sold."

"What if someone comes around to show the place tomorrow?"

"I'll shoot their fucking tires and they can walk the whole thirteen acres back to the main road. I bet we get there first."

They were still sitting in the car, staring at the house. It turns out Seth had never seen what Dean Winchester looks like when he digs his heels in. It was kind of cute. And it also made him want to smack that stubborn expression off his face. An interesting combination he definitely wanted to examine later.

"I need to do something about your arm. And collar bone. This is why I robbed the fucking clinic, remember?"

"It's too open. No cover, no trees, no way out but one dirt track."

"Yes, because having trees and cover worked so well in Snow Shoe."

Dean blinked at him then grinned, a sort of a sideways smile that made Seth's stomach flip.

"If I wasn't hurt right now you'd throttle me."

"What gave it away?"

"You get this little wrinkle in between your eyebrows when you're irritated. I like it."

Seth felt his face heat up,

"We're staying here."

"Just today and tonight. We're moving on tomorrow."

"Fine."

## Chapter Management

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Chapter 13: This is not a drill

## Chapter Text

For the third time in the last fifteen minutes he dialed half the number, then hung up. His head was starting to swim again.

Seth had begun the series of tortures by forcing him into the shower because, as he put it, 'God knows when you'll get another and you stink.'

Then he'd offered to help, which Dean curtly refused. He was perfectly capable of washing himself, cripple or not. Even if it did take him almost an hour during which he'd used most of the hot water and managed to break open the scab on his scalp. Now he had a neat row of stitches on the right side of his head that were irritating as fuck.

After that, Seth had tortured him for an additional hour, pushing his forearm bone back in place and splinting it tightly, then wrapping him all up in a sling he'd made out of a shirt. He'd finally squirted another milliliter of that shit down Dean's throat and took off to look for a sports goods store. In Dean's car. He let Seth take off in his car. And he still wasn't sure if that had been a conscious decision or if it was the fucking morphine.

The house had heat, electricity and hot water. Basic appliances like the fridge and the stove. The rest of it was all wood floors and freshly painted walls, not one single piece of furniture to be found. Seth had announced that Dean can't be sleeping on a wooden floor with a broken collar bone. Waved off yet another very reasonable suggestion they move on tonight. Then pretty

much bullied Dean into letting him take the car to go buy sleeping bags. The entire time Dean wasn't sure if he wanted to kiss him or kill him. Maybe a little bit of both.

But he'd been gone for almost twenty minutes now and Dean knew he wouldn't go far. If he was gonna call Bobby and tell him what happened, now was the time. Before Seth came back. Except that he was still angry. And now that the morphine was starting to kick in again, he was afraid of what he might say. He was afraid he might open his mouth and blurt out everything, not just the anger and the disappointment but everything else too. How Seth had a fucking dimple in his cheek when he smiled. How his eyes had yet to settle on a color, ranging everywhere from grass green to sunflower yellow. How smooth the hollow of his throat was, how it tasted. The little wrinkle in his forehead when he was frustrated, the curve of his mouth when he was being stubborn, the set of his jaw when he was angry. How fucking amazing and strong he was, this goddamned kid he'd only met five days ago. Already feeling like a part of Dean, like he'd always been there.

And what if Bobby wasn't trying to protect Seth? What if all that shit on the phone was a lie, and Rufus was supposed to take Seth out? What if Seth was something that Bobby thought needed to be hunted down and killed?

'You're like a son to me, your daddy was family, but don't push me.'

That was the first time Dean had heard Bobby genuinely angry with him. Because he'd endangered Seth by kidnapping him or because he'd endangered himself?

Stupid. Sitting here and speculating when it could all be solved with one phone call. But he'd been going about this all wrong. Maybe the morphine was helping a little bit, but some things were now pretty fucking obvious. He was not about to let Seth go for anything. Not even if he was some bizarre demon spawn. Not even if it meant falling out with Bobby or having every single hunter in the world on his tail. And maybe this whole thing would end up going sideways. Seth gone dark side, and Dean forever being known as the guy who fell for a monster. Twenty years from now, hunters could be using him as an example of what happens when a moron falls in love with something supernatural. He found that he didn't much care one way or the other.

Maybe they would just show up on Bobby's porch. Without a warning or a phone call. The old fucker didn't deserve a warning at this point. He probably already knew something had gone horribly wrong; Dean imagined that Rufus would've checked in hours ago if he was still alive.

Good. Let him wonder what the fuck happened. Dean was done sharing information with someone who had almost got him killed. At least until he heard a damn good explanation for all the fucking secrecy.



He heard the Impala's engine and tucked the phone back in his pocket. He should tell Seth. He knew so little anyway that it wouldn't make much difference. Except that he had no clue how to even start without making himself sound like a douche bag. He'd only seen that hurt and disappointed look on Seth's face twice, but it was enough to know he never wanted to see it again.

Seth stumbled into the kitchen, half a dozen grocery bags in one hand and three enormous bags swinging off the other shoulder, threatening to tip him over.

"Jesus, how many sleeping bags did you get?"

"Two. And an air mattress. And food."

He dropped the three bags on the floor and grinned at Dean, looking pretty pleased with himself. Dean was tempted to ask him if he robbed a store, since neither one of them had any money as far as he knew. But it seemed impossible to say anything with that thousand watt smile turned his way, Seth's cheeks flushed from the cool air, his hair ruffled and sticking up behind the left ear.

"An air mattress, huh?" he said, his voice stupidly cracking,

"I would've never thought of getting one of those."

Seth's smile became impossibly brighter,

"It comes with a little pump. You can plug it in or stick batteries in it, so we can bring it with us, just in case."

And there was that word again. Us. We. As in the two of them together.

Dean smiled, sure that it looked as goofy on his face as it felt.

Seth's smile turned into a smirk,

"How's the morphine working?"

"Great. Good. Nothing hurts."

"Good. Are you hungry? I was gonna try and make some food that doesn't come out of a can."

"Hungry. Sure."

He was hungry. And he felt good. Content and calm and maybe a little sleepy. He shifted slightly on the floor, stretching his legs and moving away from the offending cupboard handle that threatened to dig into his ribs. Seth set the bags on the counter and started unloading enough food for a week's worth of stay. Dean wanted to remind him again that they were leaving in the morning and ask him what he intended to do with all that crap.

Instead, when he opened his mouth, something entirely unexpected came out,

"I didn't mean that shit back at the cabin."

Seth froze with one hand elbow deep in a grocery bag. Dean watched a curtain drop over his expression, turning it cold and unfamiliar. It took him a few moments to realize what he'd said,

then it took even longer to realize how it sounded. And the entire time Seth stood unmoving, so still that Dean could not even see his chest move.

"The thing about not wanting to take you with me, that's what-- I didn't mean that, the shit about getting arrested because of you, not the other-- not the other stuff, I meant the other stuff. God, why am I still talking?"

Seth had started moving again, but slowly, making a distracted pile of vegetables next to the bag, his face still unreadable. And Dean didn't want to shut up. He wanted to explain. He wanted Seth to understand why he'd said it.

"I got a call that morning from a-- friend. Another hunter. An old friend of my dad's. He told me to take you home, right away. He said-- he implied that I'd endangered you or maybe myself, I don't really know, Bobby can be a cryptic fuck when he wants to be, but he threatened me. He said if we're not on the road in an hour he'd have someone else take you home. That's why-- I'm pretty sure that's why Rufus was there, just in case I put up a fight. And I think maybe he knew about the demon. Or that we were in some kind of a danger, not that he felt the fucking need to share it with me. And about you. I think he knows you're special. I might be wrong, but that's the only thing that makes sense--"

"Stop talking."

"I should've--"

"Shut up, Jesus, just shut up."

His hands were gripping the counter tightly and he looked like Dean had just swiped the rug from under his feet.

"You're telling me you knew? You and your fucking buddies knew that there was something fucked up about me? And you didn't fucking say anything?"

Dean struggled to his feet. This was going horribly wrong.

"No. No. I didn't know anything except that I had to bring you home. Or Bobby was gonna have someone do it for me. That's all. He wouldn't tell me anything. He said that once I was done, to come see him and he would tell me everything he could."

"Right. No, that makes sense," Seth rubbed his mouth,

"A friend of yours calls you up and tells you to get rid of me. So you do. You don't ask why. You lie to me about it. It all makes perfect sense."

"I didn't--"

"And if that goddamned-- thing, hadn't come along, you would've just gone ahead with it. Driven me home, left me there so I can freak out on someone else. Maybe get a bunch of people killed. And then what? Next time I saw you I probably would've been staring into the barrel of your shotgun, right? Cause that's what you and your fucking buddies do, isn't it? Kill monsters?"

"No, that's not--"

"Or maybe your buddies weren't even supposed to wait that long. Maybe they planned to take care of the problem themselves, the moment I was out of your sight. Maybe sooner. You fucking

expect me to believe that they knew I was a goddamned freak but that they drove all the way to fucking Snow Shoe, Pennsylvania to make sure you got me home safely?"

"I don't know. I don't know why they were there, I don't know what they knew, I don't know what Bobby knows because he didn't fucking tell me anything, ok? I'm just as clueless as you are."

"You would've handed me over to them," there was a cold certainty in his voice that made Dean's stomach shrivel up,

"Wouldn't have asked one single question, wouldn't have cared what they were gonna do with me. You would've just handed me over and drove away."

"No."

"And why not? They're what? Your brothers-in-arms, or some shit? Friends, family? Definitely more important than someone you fucked for two days. You think they minded that you fucked a freak? A monster? Or was it gonna be a funny story you got to tell others?"

"Stop fucking saying that," Dean snapped,

"You're not a monster and you're not a freak! Stop fucking saying it!"

And wonder of all wonders, that actually shut him up. Dean felt like he'd gone ten rounds with a punching bag and lost. His head was swimming, his stomach was turning unpleasantly and he was pretty sure that he never wanted to taste morphine again. But he pressed the advantage. He'd think about the consequences later. Or never.

"I was gonna ask you to stay with me, back at the cabin, before the phone call. To come with me. Hunt with me. I didn't-- I said I was gonna take you home but I don't think I ever really meant it. I trusted those men with my life. Rufus, I owed him my life. He's saved me so many time I lost count, but I would've never, never let him take you. And Bobby, he-- he pretty much adopted me after dad died. Shit, he'd adopted me way before that; those last few years dad wasn't-- he wasn't exactly all there I think. But if he tried-- if he plans on killing you I'll rip his throat out. Do you understand what I'm saying? I don't care what you are, what that-- thing you can do means. I don't care if you're demon spawn or a fucking unicorn in disguise. I don't care."

Seth swallowed heavily and looked away.

"Don't be mad at me, ok?" Dean said softly,

"I didn't know. There are people all over the place, seers, mediums, people we protect and keep an eye on. I thought maybe you were one of them. And afterwards-- I didn't know what to say or how to say it. I didn't wanna assume things and you were-- you were kind of a wreck. What was I supposed to do?"

"Not hiding shit from me would've been a good start."

"Yeah ok, but in the case you haven't noticed, I'm not really good at this."

"And what is 'this'?"

"I don't know. I just know I suck at it."

Seth turned away and started unloading the bags again,  
“You turned my whole life upside down. My nose is broken, my future is ruined, my parents probably think I’m dead.”

“I’m--“

“I robbed a fucking animal clinic at a gunpoint,” Seth rode right over him,  
“and I traumatized a bunch of people who didn’t fucking deserve it. I’m probably gonna end up going insane if this-- ‘thing’ doesn’t kill me first. So what I need from you is to not fucking lie to me, ok? Can you do that?”

A bag of carrots hit the counter with a smack,  
“I don’t fucking think that’s a lot to ask, considering.”

“No. It’s not. You’re right.”

Seth took a deep breath,

“Do you have a knife?”

“Are you gonna stab me with it?”

“Tempting. But I’m sick of patching you up. I need to cut this stuff up with something.”

Dean pulled a knife out of his boot and handed it over.

“Sit back down,” Seth said,

“you’re gonna fall over. And you can start by telling me what that thing was that attacked us. And how to kill it.”

--

Aluminum foil. The kid cut up a crapload of vegetables, potatoes, little chunks of beef, dumped them all on foil and drowned them in some sort of a sweet and spicy sauce Dean had never heard of. Then closed up the foil and showed the whole thing in the oven. They ate on the floor, picking up chunks with their hands and hissing when they burned their fingers. It was probably the best meal Dean had in years.

He told Seth everything he knew about demons, which wasn’t much. Everything he knew about vampires which was considerably more. He carved the devil’s trap in the wood floor so Seth could see it. Not the most graceful devil’s trap since his right hand was out of commission but close enough. Explained about the salt, the dead man’s blood, holy water. The difference between ghosts and poltergeists, how to get rid of both. Seth seemed to soak it all up like a sponge. Dean would bet his life that the kid could repeat it all back to him, word for word,

without a mistake. Whatever else Seth was, Dean had no doubts that he was meant to be a hunter.

At one point he dragged his duffle over and took out dad's journal. There were some things that just couldn't be described and dad had always been good at drawing. He explained what a hunter's journal was, how important it was. The reverent way Seth handled it left Dean feeling oddly grateful and melancholic.

Evening crept up before either one of them noticed, wrapping them both in gloom. Only then Dean noticed how tired Seth looked, the deep bruises under his eyes, how his hands shook as he turned the pages.

"We should get some sleep," he said.

Seth glanced up at the window,

"I guess turning the lights on would be pretty stupid, huh?"

"Too open. No cover."

"Right," he closed the journal carefully and handed it back,

"I'll get the air mattress."

"I'll make sure nothing gets in while we're sleeping."

--

The mattress was definitely big enough for both of them. Cushioned by a sleeping bag with another one on top, it was more comfortable than Dean had expected to be. Except that he he couldn't turn on his right side because of the fucking sling and when he tried turning on his left to face Seth, his collar bone felt like it was trying to puncture its way out of his skin. Which meant he could write off sleeping for the night. He never understood people who could sleep on their back.

The morphine was starting to wear off and he welcomed the pain. The comfortable numbness was tempting but it also made him slow and sluggish. He couldn't afford delayed reaction time now, not when he was already crippled. He'd carved devil's traps in front of every doorway, lined the windows and doors in piles of salt so thick that the weak moonlight made them look like snow drifts. And it still didn't feel enough.

He stared at the ceiling for a while, reassessing what he was capable of now, with his right arm immobile. It was fucking depressing. His balance was off, he would be useless in hand to hand, only slightly less so in a knife fight. He could shoot with his left, only if the thing he was shooting at kept its distance. In other words, anything faster than a human would rip him apart on a first

try. How the fuck were they supposed to go on like this? How was he supposed to protect Seth if the demon found them again?

Seth shifted next to him,  
“I can hear you worrying.”  
“I’m sorry.”

Hot breath washed over his arm and he shivered.  
“You think she’ll find us again?”  
“I don’t know,” Dean said,  
“She could be gone for good. Or she could be waiting outside in the morning.”  
“So,” Seth sighed, his hand curving over Dean’s hip,  
“there’s a fifty-fifty chance we might be trapped here in the morning. Or dead.”  
“Yeah, I guess so.”  
“Then you better make this one count Winchester, cause you might not get another.”

Dean couldn’t help but chuckle.

And in the beginning it was funny, and cute. Seth straddling him easily with those long fucking legs, his mouth sweet and hungry, warm fingers sneaking under his boxers. His teeth nipping at Dean’s chin and neck, hair like silk against his cheek, Seth’s cock pressing into his hip, hard and hot. It stopped being funny when Dean tried to use his right arm by mistake and it definitely stopped being cute when he arched towards Seth and his collar bone howled.

“Fuck.”

Seth froze, his breath bathing Dean’s face,  
“What? What happened? Did I--?”  
“No, it wasn’t-- it was me, I keep forgetting about this bullshit. It’s ok. It’s fine.”  
“Are you sure?”  
“Yeah I’m sure,” he found a handful of Seth’s hair and pulled him down,  
“I’m sure.”  
“Just don’t move, ok?” Seth whispered, his mouth hovering an inch away from Dean’s.  
“Ok.”

Impossible. It was fucking impossible not to move. Seth slithering down Dean’s body like a fucking snake, his lips closing one one nipple, sucking it into his mouth. Dean’s cock trapped against Seth’s stomach, providing just enough pressure to feel like fucking torture. Seth’s hands spreading his legs so he could hold him down with his whole body, Seth’s tongue leaving a wet trail down his chest and stomach, dipping into his navel, teeth biting the soft flesh below it. Everything so torturously slow that Dean wanted to scream.

Seth's palm pressed against his cock and he rocked his hips forward blindly, hissing from the combination of pain and friction.

"I thought I told you not to move," Seth growled against his stomach, fingers digging into Dean's thigh hard enough to bruise.

The words cut across Dean like a whip, sharp and unexpected. He hissed, cock jerking under Seth's palm, pre-come spilling over his stomach, soaking his boxers in seconds.

"Fuck," Seth gasped, his hand sliding over the wet material.

Dean was fucking panting. He was panting and he was blushing. He was so hard now that it hurt and all it took was-- all it took was one growled reprimand and Seth's fingers hovering on the edge of some kind of punishment, and how fucked up was that? He'd never, ever had this type of reaction to-- because he'd always been the one who would--

"Fuck," Seth repeated softly, sounding awed, he sounding like he'd discovered something priceless.

His hands shook as he tugged on Dean's boxers, peeling them off slowly, leaving a trail of pre-come on the inside of Dean's thigh. Cold air hit sensitive skin and Dean shivered, feeling exposed.

Shaky or not, Seth's hands easily hooked under Dean's knees and pushed them back, further this time, until there was nothing hidden, until he was spread out in front of him. Dean felt heat flood his face and neck, his throat threatening to lock up. A small part of him trembled in embarrassment, rebelled at the vulnerable position. He'd never-- no one had ever--

"Don't move."

Dean squeezed his eyes shut, his fingers finding a handful of the sleeping bag and clutching it tightly.

"Jesus," Seth whispered, hands pressing down on the inside of his thighs, spreading them wider until Dean's legs shook with effort to keep them in place.

He wanted to beg. Beg him to either stop or get on with it, but to do something, anything.

Anything except for holding him open like that, every inch of him on display, and fuck, what must he look like right now? He's not all smooth and pretty like Seth and no one had ever been interested in--

"Baby," Seth said, his voice cracking.

The hands gripped him tighter, spread his cheeks and Dean felt his hair first, soft brush against his thigh before a tongue carefully swiped across the crack.

He jerked at the sensation, his stomach clenching, torn between the need to hide and to feel it again. Seth made a sound, a low growl, his fingers digging into the flesh. His tongue circled the rim, a slight pressure, searing hot and wet and Dean whined, forgetting how to breathe.

He knew it would feel good, he'd done it enough times to others to know exactly how fast to go, where to press his lips, how light the scrape of the teeth should be. He'd done it to Seth at the cabin and nearly lost his mind at how he tasted, the noises he made. Seth had come from Dean's tongue alone, clenching tightly around him, spilling over the sheets with a sob. But he'd never let someone do it to him. It was too close, too personal, too much.

Seth's tongue lapped at him, wide, short swipes, spit trickling down the crack to collect under Dean's spine, sloppy and messy and growing more urgent with each swipe until he pushed his way in, lips pressed around the rim. Dean moaned, feeling the sweet pressure of it travel all the way up his spine. His cock spilled another river of pre-come on his stomach and Seth made a noise with his tongue still buried deep, a raw and totally fucking indecent sound that made Dean blush all over again.

The kid had his tongue in Dean's ass. This was not a fucking drill. This was fucking happening.

Seth attacked it with his tongue, his lips sucking on the rim, the vibrations of his groans hitting Dean like electric shocks, each one stronger than the one before, the wet sucking sounds echoing in the empty space, making it all so much more fucking intense until Dean's toes were curling on their own, until he was trembling so hard that his teeth wanted to chatter. He could hear himself moaning and cursing and gasping for breath, trying to slide down lower and take Seth's tongue in deeper, fighting with the urge to wrap his hand around his cock because it would all be done in seconds, so quickly it would be fucking embarrassing. Seth sounded like he was dying, like he was drowning, his fingers slippery against Dean's cheeks, fighting for purchase to spread him open, fingertips catching on the sensitive muscle each time his tongue withdrew long enough for him to take a breath. Dean heard himself beg without having any clue what he was beginning for until he felt a fingertip replace the tongue and it was like a fucking revelation, like an epiphany because he'd never wanted that. Since his first time at fourteen with some blonde kid he'd known for less than three hours bent over a park bench in East-No-One-Gives-A-Shit, Missouri, he'd fucking known that this wasn't his thing. He'd known what he wanted even then, the kid's pretty pink hole spread out in front of him, almost elegant cock hanging below it. He would give and give with his hands and mouth until the kid fucking cried, until he fit around Dean like a glove, but Dean would never be the one to spread his legs for someone else.

And still, he'd tried it two years later, in some dump of a bar while dad was passed out drunk, with a guy old enough to BE his dad. Dean had had his fingers up there before, he knew how good it could feel, and the guy had been in awe of Dean's smooth skin, muscled legs, flat teenage stomach. He'd said so over and over again, praising, worshipping, prepping, so Dean let him. And it was uncomfortable and sweaty. He didn't come until the guy was done and Dean got to fuck his mouth. Later, leaking and wet and sore, he'd told himself never again. It just wasn't his thing.



Except he was so fucking wrong. Seth's finger pushing past the entrance, slick with spit, Seth's tongue circling the rim, squirming in next to the finger, quick panting breaths on over-sensitized skin, hungry sounds vibrating through Dean's spine, he fucking wanted. He pictured it, Seth's beautiful cock pushing inside of him, impaling him, filling him up, and he nearly fucking choked, his stomach muscles clenching tight, his cock now so fucking painful that it overwhelmed the pain of his ribs and arm.

"Seth--" he gasped,

"Seth come on-- come on, please--"

Seth growled, the finger pushing in to the last knuckle, burning despite the slippery slide of spit everywhere else.

"Fuck," He rasped,

"so fucking tight Dean, Jesus, when was the last time you-- I can't like this-- it's gonna hurt and I don't have anything--"

"I don't care just-- come on," he released his death grip on the sleeping bag to find Seth's arm and tug him forward, his hips riding the finger on their own, shifting to find that spot, feeling like he was gonna die if Seth doesn't fuck him right now, right this fucking minute.

Seth let out a string of swears against Dean's thigh and pushed in with two fingers, carefully, slowly, and it fucking hurt and burned and still wasn't enough. Dean was gonna come. He was gonna fucking come on those fingers, untouched, and that was fucking crime because he'd never fucking wanted anything as much as he wanted Seth inside of him right now, never mind the prep, never mind the pain. He wanted to limp for days, wanted to feel it for weeks, wanted to not be able to fucking sit down. What was coming out of his mouth now was just a jumble of pleading and whimpering with no sense or reason, he was past being embarrassed, past any sort of coherent thought process, he just fucking wanted and wanted and wanted. And then Seth found it, he found that spot, fingers brushing over it roughly and Dean cried out, his entire body arching off the bed, the pain flooding the right side of his body somewhere on the very edge of periphery where it didn't matter, where nothing fucking mattered.

"I can't," Seth panted against his leg,

"I'm sorry but I won't-- I'm not gonna hurt you, just-- stay still, don't move."

Dean barely heard him, Seth's fingers now finding that place with ease over and over again and it was like holding on to a single thread at the edge of a cliff and not being able to let go, straining at the very fucking edge of an orgasm every time and not being able to come. Seth's other arm pressed against his stomach, forcing his hips flat against the bed, stopping him from arching up and it was torture, it was painful and sweet torture. Dean covered his mouth, sunk his teeth deep into the flesh at the bottom of his thumb and he did it just in time, cause in the next moment the thread was gone and he was falling, he was jerking on Seth's fingers, clenching around them tightly. His throat locked on a muffled scream, hot come splattering over his stomach and chest, everything around him shattering into a million painful, beautiful fucking

pieces. Taste of copper spilled into his mouth and he mewled around it helplessly, hips still pushing towards Seth's fingers, another splatter following the first, coating him up to the neck.

The arm holding his hips down disappeared.

"Oh God-- Dean-- fuckfuck--"

Through the blood still pulsing in his ears, Dean heard a high pitched whimper, felt Seth's teeth scrape his thigh, felt the mattress rock under his ass. He lifted up on one elbow, ignoring the tug of his collar bone, and saw Seth fumble his cock out with one hand, the other still trapped inside Dean. He watched Seth stroke himself twice in quick succession, his movements rough and frenzied, and when Seth whined Dean whined with him, sliding closer so Seth's cock was pressed against him, the tip so fucking close to where he'd wanted it to be. He shuddered when Seth cried out, feeling the hot liquid spill over his hole, Seth's fingers still buried deep, the tip of his cock pressing lightly next to them, pulsing against him. Seth's mouth opened wide, lips pink and wet, hair damp and stuck to his forehead, chest heaving, thighs trembling, every inch of him so fucking lovely.

Dean shifted slowly, pulling away from the fingers, hissing as they scraped him on the way out.

"Sorry," Seth hissed breathlessly,

"Sorry, I didn't--"

Dean found his mouth before he could finish whatever fucking nonsense he was sorry for, wrapping an arm around his waist and pulling him close until there was nothing between them but the stupid fucking sling Dean wanted to rip off with his teeth. Seth moaned into his mouth, a sweet little sound that made Dean's chest constrict.

He wanted to tell him that was the first time, the only time he'd ever let anyone do that. That it was the first time he'd ever wanted to. He wanted to tell him that he, Dean Winchester, was so fucking in love with him, with every inch of him, with his soft hair and perfect mouth and talented fingers. With his fucking bravery and strength, with the little wrinkle in between his eyebrows and the sharp edge of his jaw.

Instead they kissed slow and lazy and Dean said nothing because he was a coward.

Long after they cleaned up and crawled back under the sleeping bag wrapped around each other, long after Seth's quiet little snores started, Dean lay awake on his back and stared at the ceiling, wondering if he would survive whatever was coming, wondering if that had been his only chance to say it.

Chapter Management

Edit Chapter Delete Chapter  
Chapter 14: You smell like bacon

Notes:

(See the end of the chapter for notes.)

## Chapter Text

Dust.

With every step he raised clouds of it. It was not exactly a road and it was too wide to be a path. It was just there, dry and abandoned, surprisingly smooth until his feet disturbed the surface. Scraggly trees to his left, dry flatlands to his right, heavy overcast sky. The air felt tight and charged as if waiting for that first strike of lightening before the gray skies opened up. Seth wasn't in a hurry. He knew he would reach his destination eventually. It didn't matter when or how. Because all of it was comfortably intimate, a walk he'd taken countless times. It didn't matter that he couldn't remember where it ended, it didn't matter that he didn't know what was waiting for him. What mattered was the road, his road, the one he was born to walk, the road he was made for.

"You remember that you have a choice, right?"

He glanced to his right and saw a familiar figure. Shaggy hair, lopsided smile, brown eyes too old for the young face. Ripped jeans, raggedy old sweatshirt, dusty sneakers. A friend. An old friend.

"I'm sorry," Seth said ruefully,

"I don't remember your name."

"Andy. Don't sweat it, you never remember. I don't think you're supposed to."

Seth nodded because it made sense.

Ahead of them, the road widened and the first rows of weathered townhouses started taking shape. Seth smiled. He knew every row by heart. He could remember. He knew the broken porch rails, the warped window shutters, the dusty curtains hanging from the shattered windows.

"You do remember?" Andy asked again.

"That you don't have to be here?"

Seth shrugged,

"This is where I'm supposed to be. So it's ok."

There was the corral with the blood stain long soaked into the ground. The old school house where dark things hid in shaded corners. The windmill peaked above the rooftops, silent and still

under the windless sky. And there was the townhouse where salt lines flickered in and out of existence on the cracked window sills. He paused in front of it, hand reaching out to touch the porch post. This is where Ava died. He couldn't remember who Ava is or what she looked like, but this is where she died. And each time he stopped to touch the post, he felt a tug of guilt.

But he was close to his destination now so he turned away, the flash of the memory already fading.

There it was. In the middle of the town, in the center of the road. The bell. He was here for the bell.

The footsteps next to him shuffled to a stop and he turned around.

"This is my stop," Andy said.

"I know. Thank you. For keeping me company."

"What are old friends for?" Andy smiled.

And if his smile was sad, that was nothing new either. Seth had a faint, elusive memory of other trips, other conversations held, disagreements and angry words exchanged. He didn't know why. How could he be mad at Andy? What could they possibly have to argue over? Andy was his friend, a good, faithful friend.

"Be careful," Seth told him, and it was a warning older than memory, one he'd repeated thousands of times under the same sky, with the same feeling of distant dread.

"You too. I'll see you soon."

Seth watched him walk away, hands tucked in the deep jacket pockets, a hood of his sweatshirt peaking above it. Watched him walk slowly, without disturbing the dust, without looking left or right. The sudden urge to call out another warning went away as quickly as it came. He was here for the bell.

He turned to face this thing he'd seen a million times, across millions of different lifetimes. It never changed. Heavy and almost crude in design, it drew him like a magnet. And when he touched it, he would know why.

His hand reached out towards the delicate tree carved into its side, pressed his palm against it, and the world exploded in a shower of pain.

--

He jerked out of sound sleep, his heart beating mile a minute, soaked in cold sweat. Looked around feeling disoriented.

White walls, curtainless windows, shiny new wooden floors. A house. In Litchfield, Ohio. Dean made a small sound and twitched slightly under the covers. The sleeping bag was pulled up to his ears, everything hidden except for one closed eye, the eyelashes sweeping over a freckled cheek. Seth felt warmth pooling in his stomach at the sight. He was so fucking beautiful. He'd been so fucking beautiful the night before, writhing and whimpering, face flushed, legs quivering in Seth's grip. Apparently Seth's cock was thinking the same thing, half hard already and digging into his hip. He could crawl under the covers and wake Dean up. Somehow he didn't think Dean would mind. But it had been a long day yesterday for both of them and judging by the light, it was still early morning.

He crawled off the mattress carefully, noticing it had deflated slightly in the night. Not surprising, considering what sort of use it got. Whoever designed it probably didn't factor in all the vigorous movement of mind blowing sex.

He dressed quietly, grabbed a bottle of orange juice out of the fridge and padded over to the nearest window. Everything looked calm and peaceful. Overcast and windless. No demons in sight. He leaned his forehead against the cool glass and tried to remember.

Dust, road, town. It wasn't an actual memory of a dream, it was a memory of a memory. Deja vu. A road he'd walked before. That was all. And even that was barely visible through thick fog. In an hour or so, even that would be gone and it would become a faint unsettled feeling in his stomach. It wasn't the first time but it had been years now since the last one. Or at least, it had been years since the last one he remembered.

Mom had had a field day with it, trying to draw out more details, trying to interpret it in a logical manner. The road meant one thing, the dust another. The town frustrated her to no end because he couldn't remember what it looked like. He knew it was a town, not a city, not a village. But anything else aside from that was gone. Houses, landmarks, there was nothing he could corner for her inspection. Eventually she'd given up and he'd forgotten about it. She would've gone nuts over this one, although he was pretty sure he could interpret it all on his own. In the past, he'd only had the dream when he was unsettled. And there was hardly anything in the world more unsettling than all the shit he'd been thorough in the last few days. He didn't need a PhD in Psychology to figure that one out.

An old dream and nothing to worry about. But the faint beginning of a headache in the very back of his head was new. He rarely ever got headaches and when he did, they were usually related to something obvious. Lack of sleep, forgetting to eat, allergies and similar crap. And then there was the pain he'd felt in the cabin. Not exactly a headache, more of an ice pick digging into his eyes, his temples. This one would probably turn out to be your everyday exhaustion headache. Nothing a few Advil wouldn't fix.

He glanced back at Dean and smiled. He'd love to wake him up with a good cup of coffee. But the local market hadn't been stocked to accommodate people who had no pots, pans, coffee

maker or kitchenware in general. Still, he would bet that he could come up with something Dean would enjoy, lack of kitchenware or no.

--

Litchfield, Ohio, house that was for sale. Smell of eggs and bacon. Slow shuffle of Seth's feet drifting in from the kitchen. No other unwelcome sounds from the rest of the house, no creaks, no groans, nothing to be worried about.

He exhaled a deep, relieved breath. He hadn't expected to sleep so well. He hadn't expected to sleep at all with the fucking sling in his way. But despite all his worrying, despite firmly believing that the morning would find him still staring at the ceiling, he'd actually drifted off. And slept so soundly that he never even heard Seth get up. He tried to think back to the last time that's happened to him, and couldn't.

He shifted slightly and was forced to reassess the condition his body was in. The collar bone hurt, his ribs were fucking howling again, the arm seemed okay but that would probably change once he sat up. He felt no urge to open his eyes. There was something soothing about knowing he didn't have to yet, that he was in a safe place and in no rush. That he could just lie there and enjoy the comfortable sound of Seth moving around the kitchen, baking something that smelled like heaven, his socks making soft sounds against the wooden floors. What would it feel like to wake up like this every morning? What would it feel like to have that kind of life?

Stupid. He was edging into the territory of impossible things.

He sat up slowly and bit his lip. Yup, he was right about the arm. He could practically feel the blood rushing to it, the collar bone rebelling at being moved, the ribs turning their howl up a notch, as if asking what the fuck he thought he was doing. It would be a long, painful day without the morphine, but he might as well start getting used to it now. Of course, he did move around quite a bit last night. Probably more than he should have. Seth had held him down in the end because Dean couldn't stop rocking his hips, arching into Seth's fingers.

He blushed remembering the noises he'd made. Had he ever before begged for anything in his life? No. Dean Winchester doesn't beg.

Except that last night he did. Pleaded in a high pitched voice, squirmed, spread his legs as far as they would go. And Seth... Seth fucking owned him heart and soul. If he'd had any doubts about it, they were long gone now.

"Morning, sunshine," Seth called out from the kitchen,  
"Did you sleep okay?"

Dean grunted in response and tackled his jeans. It was incredible how many things required the use of both hands. Pulling them on was awkward and it took entirely too long. Zipping them up

was equally as annoying. The he got to the button and started swearing under his breath. He heard Seth's quiet chuckle moving closer and redoubled his efforts, feeling utterly ridiculous. Seth slapped his hand away. Buttoned his pants, his knuckles brushing Dean's skin and making him shiver.

"I could've done it," Dean said, wishing he didn't sound so petulant.

"I know," Seth said easily, his palm sliding over Dean's stomach, his hip bone, raising goosebumps where it passed,  
"but my way was faster."

His eyes were dark green this morning, a forest after a storm. Dean found himself reaching up to touch the birth mark next to his nose, to trace his cheekbone with his thumb. He'd always thought that calling them 'beauty marks' was dumb. What could possibly be beautiful about an obvious flaw on someone's skin? God, he was so far gone. He was so far gone here, he couldn't even see the way back.

Seth smiled,

"What?"

"What?"

"I don't know. You've got this look on your face."

"I'm-- you smell like bacon."

Seth snorted a surprised laugh which Dean effectively cut off with his mouth. Surprise or no, Seth tilted his head, lips parting, letting him in. His tongue slid against Dean's, lazy and slow. He tasted like laughter, like happy dreams and easy, comfortable mornings.

When he pulled away he was still smiling,

"I guess you really like bacon."

--

There was bacon. And scrambled eggs. And toast with melted cheese on top. All out of the oven and all made on fucking foil. The kid was a goddamned genius.

Dean was finishing his third sandwich when Seth asked the same question Dean had been asking himself most of the night.

"Now what?"

Their options were definitely limited. Dean would love nothing more than to find a safe place and hide out until it all blows over. There was no way in hell he could take on a demon again until his arm was back to normal. And he never, ever again wanted to see Seth do... whatever the hell he'd done back at the cabin. Whatever it was, Dean didn't doubt that it did some damage to

Seth. The kid's nose hadn't stopped bleeding for a good hour afterwards and even though he hadn't complained, Dean had seen him rub his temples every once in a while and grimace while he was doing it. No, he needed to keep the demon away from Seth and Seth away from the demon. So what were their options?

"Bobby," he said,

"Bobby-- knows stuff. He might know why the demon's after you. And even if he doesn't, it's the only place you'd be safe. The only place where we'd both be safe."

"Unless he plans on having me killed."

"I don't think so. One of the first things he'd asked me over the phone was whether you were safe. I think he wanted to protect you."

"Then why didn't he tell you that?"

"I don't know. But I'm gonna find out."

Seth scooted back and leaned against the kitchen cabinet, rubbing the back of his head,

"So you trust him."

"With my life. I'd like to strangle him right now, but yeah. I trust him."

"All right," Seth sighed,

"Let's do it then."

--

A fifteen hour ride. No problem. They'd already agreed not to stop anywhere, just to drive straight through. Dean offered to switch back and forth, to give Seth a break. But Seth didn't mind driving. Or at least, he didn't mind driving this car. It felt comfortable, natural, like he knew the car and the car knew him. For a few hours, Dean seemed intent on cramming all the hunting knowledge he'd acquired over the years into Seth's head. And Seth was grateful for it. But there were other things he wanted to know, things he would never ask outright. It took a while to carefully steer Dean away from dry facts and into his personal experiences, and then from there, to nudge him towards talking about other hunters, friends, and his dad.

John Winchester had been... a fascinating man.

Fascinating was the nicest description he could come up with and he decided to stick with that just to be safe. Because it was pretty clear that despite their many differences and some buried resentments, Dean had worshiped his father. And it took Seth only a matter of hours to hate the man with a passion he didn't think was possible.

It wasn't even the big stuff. Not the whole living on the road, never knowing where they were gonna sleep or if they would get to eat, not the fact that the man had raised his only son to be a perfect killing machine. Seth couldn't imagine growing up in the world full of monsters. John Winchester had trained his son to be capable of protecting himself against everything and anything that might come after him. After having already lost a wife and one son, Seth could



understand why the man would do anything in his power to keep his last son safe. So he couldn't blame John Winchester for the lifestyle Dean had led most of his childhood. He couldn't judge what he didn't understand.

No, it was the little things. The tidbits that slipped through, that Dean added almost offhandedly. How John had abandoned him for three months because Dean had gotten too sick to hunt. Numerous times John had left him behind when he would go on a hunt too dangerous for Dean. A hunt too dangerous for a fourteen year old boy was understandable. Leaving him in some hotel on the side of the highway in Texas wasn't. Leaving him for such long stretches that Dean used to run out of food money and have to resort to shoplifting. And the one time he'd gotten caught, letting his son be transferred into a corrections home for underage boys, as if it had been Dean's fault that he'd had no money for food.

Little things. Piles of them.

And yet Dean had loved him. It was obvious in every line of his face, in the timbre of his voice, in the small smile that appeared every time he told another story of John's successful hunts. Seth couldn't believe how much it hurt to listen to those stories, to know that the only person in this world that was supposed to love Dean Winchester unconditionally had fallen so short of the mark.

To hear that John had decided that Dean was fit to hunt on his own when he'd turned seventeen. Seventeen. At seventeen, Seth was still driving his daddy's Mercedes, fighting with mom over his college choices and sweating over asking Neil Mercier to the prom. At seventeen Dean took on his first wendigo, by himself, with no one there to watch his back, with no one there to patch him up when the thing tore off a chunk of flesh. That was the scar Seth had traced with his fingers not so long ago, a scar no one had sown up. Three of those monsters. Dean had taken out three of them with no help before he'd even turned twenty one. Countless other supernatural things Seth had never heard of, including an entire nest of vampires where he'd barely escaped with his life. That was where the burn scars came from.

By the time they drove into Peoria, Illinois, some eight hours later, Seth had heard enough. He parked the car behind some small gas station that looked like it had been closed for years. And he answered Dean's questions by crawling into his lap and kissing him until neither one of them could breathe, until the windows were covered in steam.

It took some creativity and a great deal of struggling, but he managed to undress them both from the waist down. It was cramped and tight and he had to be careful with Dean because the stubborn fucking man had refused to take anything for pain. So he ended up hitting his knee on the car door more than once and bruising his back on the dashboard, but it was worth it. Finding the lube Dean had tucked away in the glove box and grumbling how he could've used it the night before, watching heat spreading over Dean's face. Sliding down on Dean's cock, watching the expression on his face, like Seth was showing him some fucking miracle, like he was awed

by him all over again. Riding him in short, quick jerks because there was barely enough space for even that much movement. Pressed up against him, both slick with sweat in moments, their breath mixing, the soft creaking of the car seat, Dean searching for his mouth every time Seth moved away even for a second, his low moans vibrating in Seth's throat. Gripping him tightly, so tightly that Seth could hardly breathe, as if he was afraid Seth would just slip away, disappear without a warning. Pressing his face in Seth's chest and whimpering as he came, the sharp jerks of his hips burying his cock even deeper, all that searing fucking heat spilling inside Seth. Immediately wrapping his hand around Seth's cock, pushing him back so he could angle his hips, knowing exactly which position would press his cock against Seth's prostate. But it was Dean's face that pushed him over the edge, the swollen lips, the bruises under his eyes, pupils blown wide. The flush of having come only moments ago still staining his cheeks and neck, his breath still ragged and loud.

Neither one of them moved for a long time. Seth would've been content to just stay in Dean's lap until he grew hard again, until they could go again. He would be happy to stay there until they both starved to death.

The clean up took a while too, struggling with putting the clothes back on in the cramped space, cleaning up the car seat which Seth kind of felt bad about even though Dean told him not to.

They were back on the road before midnight, driving out of Peoria and towards Sioux Falls.

Notes:

This is chapter that was meant to be longer and published next week. But, I wanted to add a chapter on Sam Winchester's Birthday :D

Chapter Management

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Chapter 15: The greens and the yellows and the browns

Chapter Text

At exactly seven thirty in the morning, Dean and Seth climbed the steps to Bobby's porch. Rumsfeld was throwing a fit in the background, practically foaming at the mouth, angry barks rebounding off the piles of junk cars. Dean almost expected to see Bobby's shotgun before the man himself, but the house stayed silent. He glanced at Seth and gave him a smile that was meant to be reassuring despite the fact that they might be walking into a trap. Because Dean had already decided. Had positioned himself half a step ahead of Seth before knocking. He wasn't entirely useless after all; he was still over six feet of flesh and muscle, and if someone wanted to get at Seth, they would have to go through Dean first. He might be a shitty shot now, but he could still stop bullets. Of course, he'd probably die in the process but it's not like he had a lot of options here. Seth made a small sound that was more exasperated than anything else

but stayed behind Dean's shoulder without complaining. He looked exhausted. They were both exhausted. An easy meal for anything that wanted to take them down. Maybe this was a bad idea. Why didn't he call Bobby first? Because he'd been too busy throwing a temper tantrum that Bobby had kept things from him. A valid reason, sure, but maybe he should've called first. Just to make sure it was Bobby that picked up the phone.

Everything had looked and felt normal though. The moment they'd stepped out of the car, Dean had assessed his surroundings, scented the air, glanced over the amount of dirt on Bobby's truck and the amount of food in Rumsfeld's bowl. There wasn't even an inkling of something out of place. Dean had checked in right before leaving the job in Virginia and Bobby had mentioned pulling out the '59 El Camino. The thing was up on a lift and missing the engine, so he'd already gotten started. Everything fit. So where the fuck was Bobby?

He knocked again, wondering if he should tell Seth to go back to the car. The door swung open and there was Bobby, finally, looking like he hadn't slept in days. Looking as crappy as Dean felt.

His eyes jerked from Dean to Seth, widened, and before Dean could draw breath to say anything, Bobby had a handful of his jacket and was slamming him against the doorway,

"You goddamned moron! You brought him here?! You drove him across the goddamned country to bring him here?! What the fuck w--"

The gunshot was so loud that even the fucking dog shut up. Something inside the house shattered. Dean actually saw the hair sticking out of the back of Bobby's hat move as the bullet passed it. So close that Dean's ears were ringing slightly and he would bet that Bobby wouldn't hear anything out of his right ear for a few hours at least.

Bobby turned his head, mouth gaping open, and if the situation was any less serious Dean would've laughed at the expression on his face.

"Take you hands off him," Seth said calmly, the gun now pointing at Bobby's forehead.

Jesus.

The kid had almost shot Bobby and Dean knew that he should say something, maybe tell him to put the gun down, but holy fuck. He couldn't look away from the hard mask on Seth's face, the fingers gripping the gun, perfectly grounded, legs spread slightly, shoulders relaxed. A stance that said he'd killed things before and he'd do it again and it would be as easy as breathing. A weeks worth of exhausted bruises under his eyes, nose recently broken, the last pair of Dean's jeans loose on his hips and torn at the knee. Dangerous. He looked fucking dangerous. And this was probably the worst possible time to feel an unbearable wave of affection for the kid. An

even worse time to be growing hard at the thought of that hard mask looking down at him, the fingers gripping Dean's hair instead of the gun.

Bobby released his hold on Dean's jacket slowly, carefully, with that same stupid expression on his face, and why the fuck didn't Dean have a camera for this? It was priceless.

"Step back," Seth said.

Bobby turned his palms out,  
"Listen, kid--"

Seth's thumb leisurely cocked the hammer and Bobby's mouth snapped shut. He took two steps back.

Dean decided that now was probably a good time to say something.

"Seth. It's ok. Put the gun down."

"Why?" Seth said coolly, eyes and gun still locked on Bobby.

"Because. He wasn't gonna hurt me."

"I just patched you up," Seth said, and now there was an undertone of anger in his voice and fuck everything if that didn't make it even hotter.

"I'm not gonna watch some redneck push you around."

No. Not gonna think like that. Seth was waving a gun around. He tried to shoot Bobby. So maybe Dean wanted to fuck him right here and now but his penis really needed to chill out because this was a bad, bad time, the worst possible time to be thinking about sex.

"He wasn't gonna hurt me Seth. Give me the gun."

"Why do you trust him? He almost got us killed."

"True. But he didn't mean to. I thought we had that settled. And I trust him for a million reasons I don't have time to explain. If you kill him I'm gonna be pretty pissed off, ok? So just give me the gun."

For a few seconds nothing happened. Then Seth lowered the gun and offered it to Dean.

"I wasn't gonna kill him," he said, sounding slightly offended,

"I would've just taken out his kneecap."

"Just the kneecap," Dean said, releasing the hammer,

"Right. That makes it better. Where did-- you stole MY gun?"

"I borrowed one of your guns. It's just a six-shooter. I figured you wouldn't even notice."

"Borrowing usually entails asking permission. Did you 'borrow' anything else?"

"Do you really expect me to go around unarmed?"

Bobby cleared his throat and Dean decided to save the 'ethics of borrowing' conversation for some other time.

"Bobby," he said,  
"This is Seth. Seth? Bobby."

Seth grunted,  
"Am I supposed to say 'nice to meet you'?"

Bobby rubbed his mouth.  
"Seth," he said, as if clarifying it.

"Yeah, Seth," Dean said,  
"You know? The kid you wanted me to drive back to NY State and leave him there even though he's got a demon on his tail? The kid you sent Rufus after? He's dead by the way, if you haven't figured that out on your own. Rufus and whoever you sent with him."

"Tim," Bobby said, studying Seth carefully,  
"and yeah, I've got the police report copy. The one about the cabin 'vandalism' too. Maybe you should both come in. I think I could use a drink now."

--

They ended up at the kitchen table, Seth and Dean on one side, Bobby on the other, a bottle of scotch in the middle. Dean had already downed half of his glass, Bobby was pouring a second for himself and Seth had not even made a move to touch his. Dean was pretty sure that there was a joke in there somewhere.

"I never thought I'd be the one doing this," Bobby said,  
"I always thought John would be alive when the time came."

"Dad? What's dad got to do with this?"

Bobby leaned back in the chair, his gaze focused somewhere on the space between Seth and Dean. Dean wasn't sure if it was because he wanted to keep an eye on both of them or because he didn't wanna be looking at either one.

"I guess I better start at the beginning, huh? I just never--," he laughed sharply,  
"Never woulda thought. I mean what are the fucking chances? Makes you think maybe there's such a thing as destiny."

He downed the second class quickly, adam's apple moving under a week's worth of unshaved scruff.

"Ain't that a fucking scary thought. Destiny."

Dean was starting to get irritated. If he'd been drinking non stop for the last day or so then nothing coming out of his mouth would make sense and Dean was in no fucking mood for drunk talk.

"Just spit it out Bobby."

Bobby slammed his glass back on the table.

"You think this is easy, you little shit? Being the only one left who knows what the fuck is going on? This wasn't my fucking job! I'd already done more than my share, and I told your dad-- I fucking told him it wouldn't work, it wouldn't make a difference. I fucking told him. Now he's dead and I'm supposed to, what? Explain to you what his plans were? I don't even know what the fuck he was thinking."

"Bobby, you're not making any fucking sense."

Bobby glanced at Seth and pushed the bottle towards Dean.

"On November 2nd, 1983, a demon killed your mother. Burned the house down. You carried your brother out of the nursery where the fire started."

"Yeah," Dean said, feeling more and more pissed off by the moment,

"And Sam died hours later. Smoke. I didn't get him out fast enough. Why the fuck are we talking about this?"

Bobby spun his glass slowly,

"John called me from the road, told me the demon was after Sam. He told me he had a plan. I argued, he didn't listen, same old same old."

"Bobby--"

"Sam didn't die Dean," Bobby said, his eyes hard and serious, like he wanted to make sure that Dean heard every word loud and clear,

"John drove here straight from Lawrence. Handed Sam over to me. I didn't know what he was gonna tell you, but if I'd had any fucking idea that he would-- that he would tell you Sam was dead, I woulda put a stop to it. Never wanted you to think that. Anything else but that."

Dean felt his fingers starting to cramp around the glass and forced himself to let go. His mouth was suddenly desert dry, full of ash.

"What are you saying?"

"Sam didn't die. We hid him. I took him to Ellen because I didn't know who else I could trust--"

"Ellen Harvelle??"

-- and Ellen took him to an old High School girlfriend. Didn't tell her anything except that Sam was an orphan and in danger. And her friend-- she couldn't have any kids. She even moved

from Nebraska to New York State and Ash forged the papers. He didn't know what he was forging or who he was doing it for. None of us really knew, see? Cause I never told John I took Sam to Ellen and Ellen never told me who she gave him to. It was safer that way. She kept in contact with Lillian, a phone call every couple of years or so. It wasn't until Sam went missing that the red flag went up. We didn't know. You didn't tell me where you were going after Virginia. I didn't know you'd be in New York, and even if I'd known-- I was sure his cover got blown, that the demon found him. I mean what were the fucking chances? Three hundred million people in the country and you managed to--"

Seth's chair scraped loudly.

"You're drunk," he said, his voice shaking,

"And insane. You're drunk and insane."

Dean barely heard him over the loud thud in his ears. He was gonna be sick.

"You made that up," Seth said, backing away from the table, voice edging into hysterics,

"My name was on tv, my parent's names, you pulled all that shit out of your ass cause you're fucking crazy."

"I'm sorry kid," Bobby said slowly,

"We just wanted to protect you. That's all. You weren't supposed to find out like this."

"No. Just-- no. No."

Bobby got up and walked over to the assortment of phones on the wall. Untangled an old beat up cordless with an answering machine. Punched the play button with his finger.

A female voice came out of the crappy little speaker, sounding tearful and afraid,

"Hello? Is this-- I'm looking for Bobby Singer. My name is Lillian Brooks. Lillian Rose Brooks.

My-- Seth is missing. I was told to call because-- I have-- I have the pictures, his most recent pictures. I'm faxing them now, just please-- let me know if there's anything else you need.

Anything. I want my son back. I did everything I was told," her voice cracked,

"I don't understand why this is happening--"

Seth made a noise that sounded like a sob. Dean wanted to get up and grab him, to hide him from this. But he couldn't. He couldn't even look at him right now. Seth was Sam, Sam was Seth, and Dean had-- Dean had-- he was gonna throw up. His mouth was full of bitter spit, a fucking river of it. He covered it with his hand. Squeezed the bridge of his nose until he couldn't breathe.

"She was afraid that they'd done something wrong," Bobby said,

"I told her it wasn't her fault. She knew so little anyway and your-- your dad even less. They'd done a good job keeping you safe until--"

"Until I showed up," Dean rasped.

"No," Seth said again and it sounded so broken that Dean wanted to scream.

He was moving before he'd even decided to do so.

"I can't-- I have to--"

And then he was fucking leaving as fast as his feet would carry him. Running like a fucking coward. Across the damn house, out and away from Seth. Because if he looked at him right now, if he even thought about everything they'd done, he was gonna eat a bullet.

He could hear Seth calling his name, sounding panicked and that fucking hurt, but he couldn't. He had to get out.

He was panting by the time he got into the car, black dots dancing in front of his eyes, feeling lightheaded. Maybe he'd pass out while driving. Maybe he'd pass out and drive into a fucking telephone pole and die. What a treat that would be.

He peeled out of the driveway, his last glance in the review mirror showing him Seth standing on the porch, still yelling his name.

--

"He left," Seth heard himself say,

"He left."

"He sure did," Bobby said behind him,

"Didn't expect that. Thought maybe he'd try and punch me out or shoot me or something."

"Shut up," Seth ground out,

"Just-- shut up or I might still shoot you."

He didn't even hear him walk away.

The dust in the driveway was staring to settle already, the sound of the impala had faded and Seth felt numb. He sat down on the porch step.

How is it possible that this was the worst part of everything?

His parents weren't his parents. His life wasn't his life. His name wasn't his name. He'd truly lost everything in less than fifteen minutes. Everything. His whole fucking life was one big ridiculous joke, lies on top of lies. He could still hear mom's voice on the answering machine, the voice he'd recognize anywhere. It had argued with him, praised him, sang him lullabies. Lied to him. His whole life, that voice had lied to him. They used to joke about his height, how one of them must've had some tall ancestors they didn't know about. His hair. His eyes. So ridiculous. He wasn't the only one who didn't look like either one of his parents, had never given it a second thought. But the first thing he'd noticed about Dean was the dimple in his chin. And had compared it to his own.



He heard himself making a small whining noise and put a stop to it. Some things were now so glaringly obvious. The fights over med school. The hissy fit mom threw when she found out he'd applied for colleges as far as three states away. The endless fights they had over his EMT job. And her friend Ellen. Ellen that called maybe once a year to 'catch up.' Seth never thought it strange that he'd never met Ellen, that Ellen never came over, that mom never had lunch dates with this mysterious High School friend. He just knew that mom had a friend called Ellen who called once in a great while, who mom always talked to in private.

He could now fully appreciate Bobby's disbelief at the whole thing. The comment about three hundred million people in the country, and yet somehow, Dean had ended up in his area, in his ambulance. Had old lady McEllin really had a heart attack instead of a false alarm caused by a couple of burritos. Had Seth not picked up that shift and opted to get some sleep instead. Had traffic been any more congested when they were responding to the scene. Had Seth been the one driving instead of Mike.

No. He was gonna drive himself insane thinking like that. There was no point to it now. Over and done with. Dean had snatched him and in a matter of days Seth couldn't imagine a life without him. In a matter of days they'd had sex and Seth had realized that he was insanely in love with a man he'd just met.

He'd had sex with his brother.

He was pretty sure that this should bother him, that it was one of those things people would react violently to. The way Dean did. Seth didn't have any siblings, for reasons that were now pretty fucking obvious. He didn't know how he's supposed to feel towards a brother. Except that he knew he wasn't supposed to want to have sex with a sibling. Cause that was kind of fucked up and unnatural and whateverthefuckyoucallit, immoral? A sin? Seth wasn't sure, he wasn't religious. It was definitely frowned upon, to say the least. But if he was gonna be honest with himself, he didn't give a flying fuck about the morality of it. Whether it was unnatural or not. Dean might be his brother, but he was still Dean and Seth still loved him. Still wanted him. It wasn't something he could just shut off. He didn't wanna shut it off. He'd never met anyone like Dean. There was no one in the world like Dean. And Seth had never felt like this towards anyone else. He remembered reading Romeo and Juliet in High School and thinking Shakespeare was a sentimental blow hard. Not being able to imagine loving someone so much that he would willingly die for them. Turns out Shakespeare knew a thing or two.

Seth couldn't just stop being in love with Dean and be his brother instead. The idea was fucking preposterous. And he didn't see why he should be bothered by it. So they were related by blood. Why the fuck did that even matter? It didn't. It didn't matter to him.

But it mattered to Dean.

And that was somehow the worst part of all this insanity. That Dean had left. That Dean had just fucking left him there, in a stranger's house, without a word. For five days they were never apart for longer than a few minutes, they'd been tangled even in their sleep. And Dean had just left. All the craziness of the vampires and the demon and having this scary fucking thing inside of him that he didn't understand, it was all somehow bearable because of Dean. And then just like that, Dean was gone and Seth was on his own. On his own with a stranger in a strange place. His life wasn't his life, his name wasn't his name, but the worst part of it all was that Dean wasn't here.

--

He wasn't sure how long he'd sat out there, ears straining, hoping he'd hear the telltale rumble of impala's engine. By the time he stood back up his legs were stiff, his ass numb, and the sun had moved a good bit across the sky. He'd made a list of all the things he wanted to say to Dean. Reasonable things. And he was sure that Dean would come back eventually, that they would talk about this and sort it out. Because he was pretty fucking sure that Dean felt the same way about him. If he could just explain to Dean that he didn't care about the whole 'incest' thing, and God, he already hated that fucking word so much, then maybe Dean wouldn't be as upset. Maybe they could go back to the way they were before. It probably wouldn't be easy and Seth could respect that. Dean needed time to figure shit out, to deal with this. And as long as he knew that Dean loved him, it didn't matter how long it took. Seth could wait. He would wait.

The house was silent and cool. He found Bobby in the living room, the half-empty bottle on the table, a large cardboard box next to it.

When he saw him in the doorway, Bobby waved toward the box and cleared his throat, "I wasn't sure if you'd want to-- John had left some stuff. For you. To look at."

"John," Seth repeated,  
"My father. John Winchester."

The hits just kept on coming. John Winchester was his dad. The man he hated without ever having met him. The man who raised Dean like a good little soldier. The man that lied to his son, let him think that his brother's death was his fault, cause he didn't carry him out of the nursery fast enough. John Winchester was his dad.

"Listen, I know this must be hard--"  
"You don't. You don't know. You couldn't possibly even imagine, ok? So spare me. And I don't want anything that belonged to John Winchester."

"Actually, most of it is Mary's."  
"Mary?"  
"Your mom."

Mom. Of course. If he'd had a dad he never met, reason stood that he also had a mom he never met. Mom that was killed by a demon. Dean's mom. His mom and Dean's mom were the same person. Ok, so maybe there were things about this 'incest' problem that he hadn't yet considered. Because that small realization suddenly seemed overwhelming.

Bobby had reached into the box to pull out a photo frame,  
"I knew her, somewhat. Mainly cause I'd known her old man. Campbell was a piece of work but he dotted on that girl like she was a princess. Never spoiled her though. Here."

He was offering Seth the picture and Seth found himself taking it.

He didn't know what he expected. But it definitely wasn't a girl about his own age, the blonde hair and a bright smile, with eyes the same color as his own. He'd always wondered where had such a bizarre color come from, the greens and the yellows and the browns. Now he knew. He studied the picture carefully, trying to find something else to go on, anything else. The shape of her mouth, her nose, her forehead. There was nothing. Just the eyes. And then he figured out why. Because he didn't look like her. Dean looked like her, he had her mouth, her nose, her forehead. Every exquisite line of Dean's face had come from this smiling, beautiful woman.

"Your grandparents were Samuel and Deanna. So they named you two Sam and Dean. After her parents."

Seth sat down slowly, still griping the picture.  
"Can I have that bottle please?"

Bobby handed it over and Seth swallowed as much as he could hold without throwing up. He put the picture in his lap. He couldn't figure out if it was odd that he already felt protective of it.

He cleared his throat roughly, feeling the scotch burning in his stomach.  
"What-- what else is in there?"

Chapter Management

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Chapter 16: What if I don't want a brother?

Chapter Text

Pictures. So many pictures.

Old dusty photo albums, full of people he didn't know and would never meet. Mary as a little girl, pigtails and ruffled dresses, looking like a tiny princess perching on her father's knee. Mary again, no more than ten years old, at a shooting range, her small face twisted in fierce

concentration. Her last day of grade school. Her first day of High School. Her graduation, cap and gown, diploma clutched in one hand. Mary with her friends, at the beach, in her first car, horseback riding. Growing taller and bolder and more beautiful.

Then a stack of photos tied together with a string, dog eared and yellowed. The top picture showed a little boy and a young man, both smiling. On the back of the photo there was a date, 1958, and a hurried scribble, 'John and Henry.' John Winchester and his father. The stack of photos was depressingly small when compared to Mary's albums, all her childhood carefully documented. That was the last and only picture of Henry. The last and only picture of John as a child. The rest showed a tired looking woman with rough hands and wispy hair, always looking like she's out of breath. John growing into a sullen looking boy, dark eyes too large for his face, all knees and elbows much like Seth was at that age. A few class photos, then John at 16, in a uniform, about to ship off to Vietnam. John leaving as a boy and coming back as a man, dark, tall, and some would even say handsome.

Oh, and then, John and Mary together. On dates, camping, at the movies. Clumsy photos, probably taken by friends, but they caught their happiness, the way they used to look at each other, like nothing else mattered. John and Mary getting married. Their house, still new and empty of furniture, Mary already round with Dean.

Dean as a baby.

This is where Seth couldn't help but smile. Dean as a toddler, chubby and perpetually unhappy, face always on the verge of screaming. Little fists always clenched and ready to fight. Dean at 2 years old, running across the back yard. Dean at 3, trying to blow out the candles of his birthday cake. Dean at 4, standing in between John and Mary, carefully studying the bundle in Mary's arms even as the flash of the camera went off. The bundle that was his brother, Sam. The bundle that was Seth. Seth was Sam and Sam was Seth and this was his family, most of them gone.

He tucked the photos back in the box, deciding that he didn't want them. That Dean would probably want them more. But after a moment, he went back in and dug out a small photo of Mary. Blonde hair shining in the sun, smiling into the camera, her whole life stretching ahead of her. He tucked the photo carefully into his pocket. A small part of who he was that he was actually willing to accept.

Then he dug through the rest.

A leather jacket that looked like it had belonged to John. He put that aside. Dean would probably want it and Seth wanted nothing to do with it. Some memorabilia from the wedding. A surprisingly small shoulder holster for a gun. Another, larger one, and more worn. He put both of them aside, assuming they were John's. And a gun. Colt MKIV Series 80 with pearl grips and an engraved slide. A beautiful weapon. Maybe a little flashy but it didn't look like it had been used very often.

"You found the colt," Bobby said, setting down two cups of coffee.

"That model came out the same year you were born. Mary loved it. Said she had two sons to take care of and wouldn't be hunting again but she carried it cause it was a gift from John."

Seth felt himself take about twenty mental steps backwards.

"She was a hunter too? My mom was a hunter?"

"Damn right she was a hunter. Samuel Campbell was a hunter, and his old man before him. That whole family's been a family of hunters since the Mayflower landed."

"But I thought John--"

Bobby snorted, interrupting him,

"John. John didn't know shit. What, you think he was some knight in armor and she was the princess? Hell no. Mary was the one with steel in her spine."

He leaned forward, touching the smaller of the shoulder holsters,

"John was never meant for that sort of life, wasn't strong enough, kept fumbling along and fucking shit up. Yeah, he grew into a decent hunter, but if things were reversed, if it'd been him that died in the fire..."

Well, no use thinkin about it. She'd want you to have it. John put this stuff aside for a reason. I don't think this is what he had in mind but he always sucked at planning ahead."

The gun felt comfortable in his hand.

"Is the smaller holster hers too?"

"Both. John usually stuck his guns wherever they would fit. I'm surprised he never shot himself in the balls. Dean's picked up all his bad habits."

"The jacket?"

"John's."

"I don't want it."

Bobby leaned back with his cup of coffee,

"He wasn't a bad man, John. He did the best he could. Under the circumstances."

"I don't care."

"Fair enough. Have some coffee."

--

He kept the gun and the larger holster. The first things he owned as Sam Winchester, that he could now call his own. His mother's gun, his mother's holster and his mother's picture tucked into his pocket. He was wearing Dean's clothes, his boots, he had Dean's knife tucked in Dean's boot. He owned nothing else but a bunch of fake memories of a fake life.

"So a demon killed her," he said.

"In your nursery, on the eve of your six month birthday."

"And you think the demon was after me?"

"Didn't know what to think. But John was sure."

"The demon that attacked us, back at the cabin, she said she was there for me. She said daddy would be proud if he saw me. Do you think she was talking about the demon that killed my mother?"

Bobby shrugged,

"Mighta been. Mighta been lying too."

Seth kept postponing the question because he really didn't want to know the answer. But really, how much worse can this day get? What the fuck did it matter? Was he gonna disappoint parents who weren't his parents? Was he gonna lose a lover who wasn't his lover but brother, and who might not want anything to do with him anyway? He literally had nothing left to lose.

"What's wrong with me? You said-- you said you had the police report from the cabin. You know that the demon didn't blow a hole in it then go off skipping into the sunset. It was me. I tore the damn place apart, I scared the demon away. What am I?"

"Telekinetic? Some sort of human mutation? Your guess is as good as mine. I started some research as soon as I heard what happened but didn't get far. You're welcome to it, gotta pretty decent library here and you'll know what you're looking for better than me."

"Why didn't you tell him? When you called, back at the cabin, why didn't you tell him who I was?"

"Because he never woulda let go of you if he knew. You were safe where you were. All these years. Chances are, if Dean didn't snatch you up, the demon never woulda found you and none of this would be happening. You can see why I wanted him to take you back somewhere where you'd be safe."

"You should have told him."

Bobby suddenly became engrossed in the contents of his coffee cup,

"Should have but didn't. What's done is done."

Seth's stomach twisted. Did he know? Did he guess?

"What if-- what if he doesn't come back?"

"He will," Bobby stood up,

"give'im a day or so to cool off, he'll be back. In the meantime we'll try and figure out what the demon wants with you. Dean's always been bad with research anyway, never had the patience for it."

He drained the rest of his cup in one gulp, as if afraid Seth would say something he didn't want to hear.

"I gotta make some phone calls. The library's off the kitchen. There's a bedroom upstairs, to the right of the bathroom. Dean used to sleep there when John left him with me. You're welcome to it."

"My-- mom. Lillian. Did you--?"

"I called her as soon as I knew you were safe."

Seth rubbed his face. A part of him wanted to call her, reassure her. A part of him was afraid he would just end up making her cry and hating himself.

"Thank you."

--

--

He pounded on the back door with his fist, kicked it with his boot, would've screamed at the top of his lungs if he could just draw enough air. He was still shaking, still felt on the verge of throwing up, all that time driving hadn't done a damn thing except helping him rehash every goddamned detail. If someone didn't open the door soon he was gonna fucking kick it in and start breaking things.

"What do you want?" a voice snapped behind him.

He turned around and faced the double barrel of Ellen's shotgun. A few paces behind her stood Jo, both of her handguns pointing at his chest.

"Dean?" Ellen said, lowering the weapon,

"What the fuck are you doing?"

"I need to talk to you," he ground out.

"What happened to your arm? Are you in trouble? Jo, get back inside. Dean, if you brought a nest down on me, I'm gonna rip your--"

"It's about Sam."

She froze, emotions flickering across her face faster than he could read them.

"Jo, go back inside. Finish the floors. I'll be in my office. Tell Ash if he comes bothering me I'm gonna break his legs."

"What's going on?"

"Nothing you need to know about. Go."

She stalked away, grumbling, and for once Dean barely even noticed her.

"C'mon," Ellen said,

"You look like shit."

--

She poured them both a drink, nothing like that cheap scotch Bobby had on hand but something smooth and lovely, flame and smoke. Her office was cluttered as always, the windowless space crowded with crates and file cabinets. She took a pile of unopened mail from the only chair that wasn't her own and Dean sat down, suddenly feeling small. Why was he here? What was he hoping to get out of this?

"Why didn't you tell me?" he said,

"How could you look me in the face and know my brother is alive and not say anything?"

"Now, listen--"

"Twenty fucking years Ellen. I thought he was dead."

"I made a promise."

"Fuck your promise! He's my brother!"

"You watch your mouth with me Dean. I'm not Bobby. He was safe. He was happy. He had a better goddamned life than any of us. If I could've given that kind of life to Jo, the money, the opportunities, a free ride to college of her choice, I would've torn my own heart out and handed it over on a fucking platter. He was protected."

"We could've protected him! Me and dad could've--"

"Could've what? John is dead! I can think of three times off the top of my head where you only survived by the skin of your teeth. And neither one of you had a demon on your tail. All the three of you could've done is die together. At least you're alive. Sam's alive. And he was safe and hidden until you went and fucked it all up. Snatched him up from the place he'd been safe for twenty fucking years."

Dean's throat tightened,

"I didn't know. I didn't know it was Sam. I thought he was just some kid and I was hurt and I needed someone to patch me up, and then... it turned out I had pneumonia."

He laughed and it sounded awful so he stopped.

"It turned out I had pneumonia so the kid went and robbed a pharmacy for antibiotics. Drove me somewhere safe. Patched me up. Then the demon came along, broke my arm, broke a couple of other things. Seth-- Sam fought it off. Patched me up again. Took care of me. I didn't know," he was staring to sound desperate, like he was trying to convince her, convince himself that he'd never had even a whisper of doubt, not even an inkling, because all he'd done in the last hour was doubt himself, wonder if he'd somehow maybe known deep down inside. And what the fuck would that have made him? How was he supposed to live with that?

"I didn't know until we got to Bobby's. He didn't know until he heard his mother's voice on the answering machine. Neither one of us knew."

Ellen was studying him like she'd never seen him before, her hands clasped together on the desk, the glass untouched,

"What are you saying here Dean? Because it sounds like--"

"We didn't know."

He was done here. It was time to go. If he stayed a moment longer he would say something he'd regret.

"Dean, wait a minute--"

But he was already moving, rushing out, and why did he even come here? What was he expecting to get out of this? Some understanding?

No one could fucking understand this.



--

Seth read until his eyes burned. All of Bobby's notes on the demon. All the notes that John left behind. He wished more than once that he could get his hands on John's journal again. When Dean had showed it to him, he didn't know what to look for. Now he did. Or at least, he was getting a pretty good idea. But that got him thinking about Dean again, the fucking expression on his face when he'd realized that they were brothers, and Seth just couldn't deal with that yet. Couldn't think about it, couldn't worry about it. There would be time to deal with all that crap once Dean came back. In the meantime, there was so much Seth didn't know, so much he needed to learn quickly. He never thought he'd envy the way Dean was raised, but there were things that Dean, Bobby, and probably every other hunter in the world considered common knowledge. Things that Seth knew nothing about. It felt like being back in the first grade again, starting from the very beginning.

Bobby had made some grilled cheese sandwiches at some point and Seth ate one without tasting it. Downed three more cups of coffee. Learned about demons and how to kill them, how to trap them, how to exorcise them. Silently thanked the curiosity which had prompted him to take Latin in college. Of course, he took it with the intention of having a better understanding of medical terms, not so he could one day exorcise a demon, but it helped all the same. He made notes on the greasy, grilled cheese napkin until Bobby dropped a leather bound book in front of him.

"It's an extra. Been draggin around here for years. Might as well use it."

It was old. Once white pages mostly yellowed at the corners from years of smoke and dust. But blank, unused.

"Thank you."

Bobby just grunted in his direction and went about his business.

Seth decided that he might like the man.

A little bit.

The day slipped away quickly, unnoticed. There were classes and classes of demons. Different abilities, different strengths. Some texts implied that the first demons were human. The others claimed the first demons were angels fallen out of God's favor. It was all speculation, mystery, nothing was certain or set in stone. He tried to stick to actual facts, reliable accounts of hunters who had faced these things in the past. But the number of those that survived an encounter with a demon was depressingly small. A few every hundred years or so, stretching back throughout history. When he stumbled across stacks of paper written entirely in Coptic, he put the demon lore aside. His head was starting to pound.

Researching his own abilities, this thing he had that he couldn't even put a name to, turned out to be more frustrating than all the demon lore put together. He wished he had his laptop, then

remembered that he didn't own a laptop any more. Seth Brooks had owned a laptop and a desktop, a car, an apartment, and a trust worth close to a quarter million dollars. Sam Winchester owned nothing. Nothing but a gun, a holster, and an old photo.

Library. There had to be a decent library in a city this size. Except that he had no car to take him there. And a glance at the wall clock showed him that the library was probably closed. He'd spent close to nine hours buried in Bobby's books. He stood up, stretched his legs, used the bathroom. Peered outside, almost expecting to see the impala parked in the driveway. Poured himself another cup of coffee that was bordering on sludge. Went back to the books.

Four hours later his eyeballs pulsed, his stomach rebelled against any more coffee and his legs were starting to cramp. He was no smarter than he was when he started. Maybe he was telekinetic. Maybe it was nothing more complicated than a demon having found someone with special abilities and wanting to use them for his own gain.

He wished it could be that simple.

He made piles of books he wanted to go through in the morning. Dumped the rest of the coffee out and washed out the coffee pot. Passed Bobby in the living room, asleep in a recliner, a half empty glass of scotch resting in front of him.

The upstairs was cool and dark.

He didn't bother turning the lights on. The junkyard was lit up like a christmas tree, the glow leaving patterns across the walls and floors. The room Bobby told him about was small but the bed was decent sized; Seth imagined Dean must have been at least five foot ten by the time he turned sixteen. He had a fleeting urge to explore, to find out if teenage Dean had left anything behind. Instead, he crawled into the musty bed and was asleep in moments.

--

One bottle. Then another. A dark, smelly bar until the last call, then on to the next.

Five in the morning found him in some hotel off the thruway. Hotel because he couldn't do it in the car. He didn't even want her in the car, sitting where Sam sat. He'd shoved cash for a cab ride into her hands while he was still conscious enough to do so. Then they fucked on the suspicious bedspread, her lipstick smearing over his shoulder.

She was everything he usually looked for. Legs miles long. Mouth perfectly shaped, a low raspy laugh that should make his spine tingle. Even drunk, she hit all the bases, rode him like it was their last day on earth. She should have been more than enough. But every time he closed his eyes he saw Sam. And even after three bottles and every thrust soaked in nauseating numbness, it still felt like a betrayal.

After she'd stumbled out, he found himself in the tub, fully dressed, booted feet propped up on either side of the faucet. Gun in hand, loaded and ready. Because that was the most obvious way to make it stop. He'd never be able to forget it. It would always be there in the corner of his mind, festering, screaming for attention. A handful of Sam's hair in his grip, his mouth, the taste of his skin. Sammy. His little brother. Neither one of them knew, they couldn't have known, and in his drunken daze, that was all right. That part he could let go of. A mistake made in ignorance he could live with.

He couldn't live with this. Knowing it would never stop. Knowing he was sick, fucked up. That he couldn't stop wanting his little brother. That he would never be able to look at him without the urge to touch him, that every girl or guy he fucked would be wearing Sam's face.

He considered leaving some kind of a note behind. Except that there was really nothing to say. Sam would know why. Sam is the only one that mattered and Sam would need no explanation. Maybe an apology, but no explanation.

The gun was cool against his temple. He knew the right way to do this. Even left handed, he could do this one thing right. Make it all go away.

And leave Sam all alone.

All alone, with no family, no friends, no one to protect him, no one to watch out for him. All alone with a demon on his tail.

He groaned, pressing the sweaty handle of the gun against his cheek.

--

This was different.

It was different because he wasn't walking, he was standing still, the dust resting undisturbed all around him. He itched to move. The road stretched in front of him, the cloudy sky overhead, everything the way it should be except that he wasn't moving. Why wasn't he moving?

"You figured it out."

Brown eyes, shaggy hair. Familiar face but somehow different. Younger. Dark green jacket instead of... what? Sweater? Sweatshirt? He tried to pick details out of memory and found nothing but fog. He wanted to growl in frustration.

"Why can't I remember your name?"

"Andy. You're not supposed to remember. He doesn't want you to remember."

"Who doesn't want me to remember? Why am I standing here? I have to go, it's waiting for me." Andy grinned up at him,

"You figured it out, man. You don't have to go. It doesn't matter what's waiting for you, you don't have to go anywhere. You can even go back if you want."

"That's crazy, why would I wanna go back?"

"Because now you have something to go back to. Here, look."

A tug on his sleeve and he was turning in place, away from the thing that was calling to him.

In the distance, the clouds had broken up. Green and lush, the blinding monochrome of a marsh after rain. A line of blue to the right, nearly matching the sky. Rolling fields of yellow flowers to the left, folding in the wind. Faint sunlight streamed down, glinting off chrome. It was so far away, yet Sam would recognize that car anywhere. The car and the figure leaning against it.

His chest twisted, expanded. He wanted to laugh and cry.

"See?" Andy said softly,

"He's waiting for you. He'll always wait for you."

He found Andy's shoulder under the rough material and latched on to it tightly, afraid to look away, afraid to blink and find it all gone.

"So-- I can-- I can just--?"

Andy chuckled,

"Yup. You can just go Sam. It's your choice."

He took a deep breath. Then another. Stepped forward cautiously. Dust rose around his feet but the car was still there, in the distance, Dean still leaning against it. Waiting.

He broke into a run.

--

He woke up panting, the sunlight burning his eyelids, sweat coating him from head to toe. What the fuck was that?

Fields, car, Dean. Already fading, moving out of his grasp. He pressed the heels of his hands into his eye sockets until colors exploded across his vision. It was important. This one was important cause he'd never dreamt of Dean before. He had to remember, he couldn't just let it slide.

It was like trying to trap water in between his fingertips. Slipping away no matter how hard he tried to grab it. Growling with frustration, he kicked the blankets off and sat up. Peeled the sweaty tee shirt off and dropped it on the floor. Shivered in the cool air.

That was his only shirt. And it wasn't even his.

He looked around, feeling out of place. Judging by the sun it was late morning. He'd slept close to ten hours. The room was almost completely bare except for one dresser, a table and a chair.

Surprisingly clean aside from a thin layer of dust that coated everything, even the bed he'd slept on.

He got up and dug through the dresser drawers, finding some old tee shirts and jeans so worn that they were almost transparent in places. But they fit. The tee shirts were a little tight and just as worn, soft and faded. Once he tucked the gun in the back of the pants though, the shirt he put on was still long enough to cover the handle. He made a mental note to steal some clothes as soon as possible. Clothes that fucking fit. Maybe a few jackets and a decent pair of boots. If he was going to lead a life of crime, he might as well be comfortable.

He was shuffling down the stairs, wondering if he should start with demon lore or try and do more research on this fucking telekinetic thing, when he heard the low rumble of Dean's voice. He stopped, heart climbing into his throat. Dean was back.

Was he ok? Was he back for good? What were they talking about? Was he telling Bobby what had happened between them? Seth wasn't ready for this. Wasn't ready to face him. What if he wanted nothing to do with Seth any more?

Out of all the options Seth had considered, that hadn't been one of them. Hadn't even been on the radar. And how fucking stupid was that? To not have an alternate plan, to not have any sort of an idea of what to do or where to go if Dean didn't want him around any more. How arrogant to assume that Dean would just come back and get over it. What fucking possessed him to think that way? This wasn't just some minor disagreement, this was serious shit. They were brothers. Brothers. Seth had had his tongue up his brothers ass, Jesus, that was all sorts of fucked up. And even though he really, really wanted to do it again, why did he assume that Dean would be all right with it? That Dean would ever be all right with it. What was he even supposed to say to him?

He made himself move, palms already slippery with sweat. Why did this feel worse than the time he was going to face a demon? It made no sense.

They were both in the living room, a pile of books spread out over the table, talking softly. "Morning," Seth announced himself, voice still raspy from sleep, fighting the urge the urge to clear his throat.

Dean looked up, his eyes shuttered, and nodded in greeting. Looked away.

Seth felt his stomach drop and told himself he was being stupid. What was he really expecting? What other reaction could there have been?

"There's fresh coffee," Bobby said, sounding uncomfortable.

Seth escaped into the kitchen.

Poured himself coffee with shaky hands and made himself sip slowly. He should go back to the living room. Dean might have news about the demon, they might be discussing things he

needed to know. Except that no one had bothered to wake him up. Dean definitely hadn't bothered letting him know that he was back. So he found himself slipping out the back door and into the yard. Settling on the hood of an old Volkswagen Beetle, its body coated with rust and half sunk into the ground. Closing his eyes and letting the sun warm his eyelids.

It wasn't the end of the world. Even if Dean-- even if Dean decided that this was it for them, that it was too weird, too wrong. It wasn't the end of the world.

Why did it feel like it was?

--

He wasn't sure how long he sat out there before he heard the back door creak.

Dean cleared his throat,

"Bobby said you were doing some research. On your-- powers."

Seth twisted slightly so he could see him standing in the shade, hands tucked in his pockets.

Trying to look anywhere but at Seth. He seemed... nervous. Dean Winchester. Nervous.

Suddenly Seth felt bad for him. Dean would probably end up shattering him into a million pieces sooner or later, but Seth still felt bad for him. Dean had spent his entire life thinking that his little brother's death was his fault. And now, instead of letting go, it looked like he'd just replaced one kind of guilt with another.

"I was. Didn't find anything. Yet."

Dean nodded, as if he'd expected the answer. Studied the side of the house. The rusty cars. Everything but Seth.

"Any news on the demon?" Seth prompted.

"Ah, no. Not really. Bobby seems to think that the one from-- the one that attacked us was just a regular, run of the mill demon. Not like the demon that killed--"

What was he gonna say? My mom? Our mom? Seth wasn't sure which one of those would be weirder.

"No omens," Dean rushed on,

"electrical storms, droughts, any of that. If we come across her again, we can just exorcise her."

"Good."

"Yeah. For the other-- Bobby has a friend in Colorado who has a weapon, a gun, that can kill anything. Daniel's been holding on to it all these years, protecting it, but now-- Bobby called him this morning. We think, the demon will probably come after you sooner or later and we should be ready. I'm gonna go pick up the gun. You should be safe here until I get back."

"Safe? What makes me more safe here than anywhere else?"

"Bobby has a panic room. In the basement. It's warded against everything."

"I'm not exactly helpless," Seth ground out, hating that Dean still wouldn't fucking look at him.

What the fuck was even the point of this? Were they gonna just go on like this forever, till the end of time? With Dean not even willing to meet his eyes?

"No," Dean said,

"you're not. But that-- thing, it hurt you. You were bleeding."

"So?"

That did it. Dean finally looked at him, gaze startled and bordering on angry.

"What do you mean 'so'? We don't know anything about it. It could be killing you."

Seth slid off the hood, leaving the cup to balance against the lonely stub of windshield glass. He was angry now. Maybe he had no right to be, but Dean was leaving. Again. After days of them traveling together, after Seth had proved over and over again that he could not only take care of himself, but that he could take care of them both, Dean was leaving him behind.

Maybe he wanted too much, too soon. He vaguely remembered thinking that he'd give Dean time to adjust to this, to think about it, the get used to the idea of two of them still being able to go on as they had before. But it fucking hurt, that Dean could just shut it off. That he could look at Seth like nothing had ever happened between them. Seth couldn't shut it off with the same ease; even if he could, he wouldn't, he would never pretend that Dean meant any less to him. And maybe Seth was fucked up and naive and stupid about this whole thing. Maybe he'd trusted entirely too much in all the ways Dean had touched him and looked at him, maybe he'd misread everything from the very first time they'd kissed. But if this thing between them was going to end, then he'd rather end it here and now.

"You know I'm capable of taking care of myself. So why don't you cut the whole 'you'll be safe here' bullshit and say what you really mean. You don't want me to come with you. You don't want me anywhere near you. You can't even fucking look at me."

"That's not true," Dean said, voice tight.

"Fine. Then take me with you."

"No. No. I can't just--" he rubbed a hand over his mouth,

"I don't know what I'm doing here, ok? I don't know how to deal with this right now. What do you want from me?"

"What do I want from you?" Seth said incredulously,

"Are you fucking kidding me? Every day, every hour I spent with you I burned another fucking bridge until there was nothing left. Until I had nothing. I don't even know who I'm supposed to be any more and you have the balls to ask what I want from you? I want the reason I threw my life away. I want the one thing that was holding me together for this past week. I want you."

"And you have me," Dean said, voice frantic and pitched low,

"I'm here. I'm here right now. But I can't-- I can't just-- all these years I thought you were dead and then I find out-- I get how you feel, I know you've lost everything but I can be your family, I can be your brother, I can be whatever you need me to be."

"What if I don't want a brother? What if I want things to go back to the way they were?"

Dean flinched as if Seth had slapped him. Color crept up his neck. He trembled, his fists tightened, and Seth knew the answer before Dean gave it.

"No," the word was shaky but final, "No."

"Then we don't have anything else to talk about."

He barely felt his legs. Somehow he managed to climb back on the hood and pick up his coffee cup. His hands shook so hard he sloshed half of it out.

The back door slammed shut. Moments later, the roar of the impala echoed across the junkyard. Grew fainter and fainter until it disappeared completely.

Seth hoped Bobby would let him be for a while. Because he'd really hate for the man to see him cry.

--

The house was silent.

Seth had no watch but he estimated that it was close to two in the morning, give or take a quarter hour. The shoulder holster fit like it was made for him. He'd probably outgrow it in a year or two but for now it was perfect. He strapped the gun in. He'd cleaned it earlier in the day, still swollen from crying and feeling like an idiot. Thankfully, Bobby asked no questions. He felt bad for stealing the man's cash. The worn leather bag and the food he snuck out of the fridge probably weren't something he'd miss, but he's bound to notice a couple of hundred dollars missing from his wallet.

Seth would repay it. He wasn't sure how yet, but he'd repay it and then some.

The photo went back into his pocket. Dean's knife in his boot. Finally, he slipped on John's leather jacket. He'd wanted to leave it for Dean but he had nothing else even remotely warm and Seth was pretty sure he'd be sleeping outside for a while. At least until he settled down somewhere.

Snaking past Bobby was almost comically easy. The man snored loudly enough to rattle the windows. Seth could still hear him as he slipped out the back door.

The moon was full and bright; he didn't need a flashlight. He had no plans, no destination. Once he got to the main road, he headed South because Dean had gone North. The rest he'd figure out along the way.

He had no doubts that the demon would find him eventually; after all, he had no intention of hiding. And that was fine. It was entirely possible that he'd die and that was okay too, as long as he took the damn thing down with him. Yesterday he was a spoiled rich kid. Today he's Sam Winchester, son of Mary and John Winchester, brother to one of the most dangerous and beautiful men he'd ever met. He had nothing and he had nothing to lose. And if he had to die, he'd much rather die as a hunter should, fighting to the end.



## Chapter Management

Edit Chapter Delete Chapter  
Chapter 17: Countdown

## Chapter Text

He was pacing Bobby's kitchen when the phone rang again. For the third time in five minutes. And the news was more of the same. It was exactly eleven hours since Bobby had discovered Sam was missing, ten hours since Dean had gotten the phone call informing him Sam had taken off, two hours since he'd pulled into Bobby's driveway feeling like he can't fucking breathe, like he's suffocating. And it wasn't getting any better either. With each phone call he was inching closer and closer to full blown panic. Bobby had exactly seven hunters out there combing the entire state. And there was no sign of Sam. Not a fucking whisper.

The Colt lay abandoned on the kitchen table where Dean had dropped it. Fucking useless pile of metal now. Why didn't he take Sam with him?

This is what happens every time Dean has to make a major decision at a moments notice. He fucks it up. He fucks everything up. This is how he almost ended up crisped to death when he decided to burn that vampire nest. This is how he lost a chunk of flesh when he decided to hunt his first wendigo alone instead of calling for help. It never mattered before that these impulses nearly got him killed because no one cared. He didn't care. He'd never had to worry about someone else, consider how his decisions would affect someone else. Why didn't he take Sam with him? Why was he such a goddamned coward that he couldn't even face sitting in the car with the kid for sixteen hours?

He kept cycling over their last conversation, trying to figure out what he could've said differently. If he could just go back, if he'd had the time to think about it more carefully instead of being cornered, Sam's fucking puppy eyes full of resentment, asking him for something he couldn't even think about yet. If he could do it again he would lie, he would say anything he had to. Dean would promise him anything he fucking wanted, anything. Just let him be alive, let him be ok. He'd never prayed for a damn thing in his life, but he found himself praying now, trying to bargain for Sam's life. He would trade his own in a heartbeat. The whole fucking thing was his fault. He's the one who pulled him out of safety, who rendered him vulnerable, pushed him out in the open. It was Dean's fault the demon knew who Sam was, where he was, it was his fault Sam was being hunted. He would do anything to change it. Anything. He would do anything to have Sam back safe.

He had a brother for less than twenty four hours and had already lost him.

The wood creaked under his hand and he realized he was gripping the back of the kitchen chair hard enough to make it splinter. He made himself let go. His jaw was clenched so tight that his neck hurt. He wanted to scream.

"Nothing," Bobby said,

"No one's seen him. He's good."

"Or dead," Dean ground out, almost choking on the words.

"I don't think so. I don't know exactly what happened back at that cabin but I imagine it'd be pretty hard to kill that kid. He'd fight back. And from what I've heard, the kid don't fight quietly."

"We gotta do something."

"We are doing something. I've got everyone on this."

"It's not good enough, it's not--" he rubbed his mouth,

"Bobby, we gotta find him quickly. That thing he can do, it's not-- it hurts him, it might be killing him. We gotta find him."

"We'll find him."

"I should've-- it's my fault. If I'd just let him come with me--"

The phone rang again. They were wasting time. Sam was out there somewhere and they were wasting time.

"Bobby, I think I know what we need to do."

--

He woke up with a start, hand automatically searching for the gun. Faint moonlight drifted through the cracks in the warped wood and threw shadows on the ground. Everything was silent. He could hear himself breathing.

For a few moments there, he'd been sure someone was watching him. But the large space was completely empty.

The barn was about half a mile off the main road and abandoned a long time ago. He didn't end up there by accident. It was an equivalent of a neon sign for any demon that was looking for him. Alone, in the middle of nowhere, totally unprotected.

He'd hitchhiked at first, just to get to the border of South Dakota. Then he'd spent the rest of the day walking. There had been no reason to hurry.

In the beginning, just him, the road and the sun beating overhead, it was different. His feet felt light. In some bizarre way, he was almost happy. For the first time in his life, he was taking control of the situation, and even though it would probably end badly for him, the freedom of it was intoxicating.

He'd been a stubborn kid, growing up. But he'd been a good kid. He supposed he'd been lucky enough to end up with a mom who had read all the handbooks ahead of time and had approached each act of rebellion like a challenging case study. She'd always known exactly what to say and he could never argue against the logic of her requests. Which is why he'd still lived a stone's throw from home at twenty. Why he'd ended up in medical field, although not

exactly in the way either one of his parents imagined. Why he couldn't remember ever making one single decision that wasn't in some way influenced by her, or by his father's intimidating presence.

In some way, despite the stress and horror of his profession, he'd still grown up sheltered. And he couldn't help but wonder what his life would've been like under John and Mary's roof. From the little he knew, John had liked his drink a little too much and Mary hadn't been the type of wife who would tolerate a drunk husband pounding up the stairs at three in the morning. There would've been fights, when all his childhood all he'd known were 'civilized discussions.' There would've been a budget, when Seth had lived his teenage years with a golden spoon in his mouth. There would've been a brother, when Seth rarely even had close friends.

It would've been messy and real and warm. The type of life he never knew he'd wanted until now, when it was too late to have it.

By nightfall though, all his thoughts had been circling back to Dean. How soon before he found out Seth was gone? Was he worried? Was he angry? Relieved? He kept replaying their last conversation a million pointless times, wondering if he'd done the right thing, if he'd said the right thing. Wavered between feeling furious and feeling guilty, between wanting to strangle Dean and wanting to apologize. Regretting that he probably wouldn't get a chance to do either. And remembering.

Dean calling him sunshine. Dean flushed with fever, that hideous orange and pink comforter wrapped around his shoulders. Dean sleeping in the passenger seat of the car, freckles standing out against pale skin. Dean pressing his forehead against Seth's, telling him to breathe. Dean sitting on the kitchen floor, that stupid morphine induced grin on his face. Dean whimpering his name. Dean kissing him, touching him, smiling at him. Dean grumbling as Seth stitched up his scalp, complaining that Seth threw up the only good booze, rolling his eyes at the granola bars, making a face at the antibiotics. Dean kissing him in the car, squeezing him so tightly that Seth still had fingerprint shaped bruises on his ribs, as if he knew that was their last time together.

Dean saying no. Just like that. Like that was all it took to put it all behind them and pretend it never happened.

It shouldn't hurt so much. Not after losing everything else that mattered. But he wanted to go back and try again. Try and not get angry this time.

"I don't think that would work pet."

A shape separated from the darkness and Seth sat up quickly, scooting back on his ass until his shoulder blades hit the wall. His hand tightened on the gun even though he knew it was useless. He tried to make out the shape of it but it stayed out of the moonlight, moving through the shadows.

"Your brother seems like the stubborn kind. Been watching him for years. I could've told you he wouldn't be up for the whole incest thing."

Seth blushed. Was the fucker reading his mind? Because that was one thing he definitely hadn't considered. And it also meant his plans have just all gone to shit.

The thing chuckled,

"Relax, you're just dreaming. You think I'd show up without knowing what I'm walking into? Good job on the devil's trap though, that's quite impressive. Did you hang off the rafters to paint that there?"

Seth glanced up at the ceiling where the black paint was barely visible against rotting wood. Yup, he was definitely fucked.

"And the salt was a nice touch too. Everywhere but the main entrance. One way in and one way out. I bet you're fully loaded too, right? Holy water in your pocket and an exorcism memorized."

Totally fucked. Totally and completely fucked.

"Nah, don't beat yourself up. Your plan was solid. If it was any other demon you were trying to trap. Can't trap me that easily I'm afraid. Can't exorcise me either."

"All right, so you win," Seth rasped,

"what do you want?"

"You, Sam. I thought that was obvious."

"Why?"

"Because you're special. Detrimental if you will."

"How? Detrimental to what?"

The thing moved into the light and Seth could finally see some of its face. An ordinary face of an ordinary middle aged man, except for its eyes. He'd expected them to be black, but they were yellow, glowing in the darkness.

"You're gonna wake up soon. Come and find me, and I promise to tell you everything you wanna know."

Seth snorted,

"You promise? Why would I trust you?"

"You're alive, aren't you? I haven't harmed you or your precious little friends. I'm gonna let you walk away if that's what you decide to do. You can go back to that family that's been lying to you. Or to your brother. If he wants you back."

That sounded too good to be true. Which meant it probably was.

Was he really dreaming all this? He couldn't be sure. The night was eerily silent and he couldn't decide if the demon's presence had caused the hush or if the lack of noise meant he really was dreaming.

He swallowed heavily.

"So I can just-- walk away, and you'll stop hunting me? You'll leave me alone? All this is gonna stop?"

"No Sam, it's never gonna stop."

It crouched so they were eye to eye, and Seth could smell it, a thick sulphury stench that lodged in his throat,

"You're not like them. You're always gonna be different. But I can tell you why. I can teach you how to control it. And I'll never lie to you."

It sneered, a twist of lips revealing surprisingly human-like disgust.

"They think you're weak, that you need to be coddled. I know you Sam. I've always known you. I will give you the truth and then I will give you a choice. It's more than you've gotten from any of them."

"You killed my mother."

"I did."

"Why?"

"It's a long story kid, and not one we have time for."

"You sent that demon bitch to hurt Dean."

"No. I sent her to find you. She wasn't supposed to hurt anyone. You have to understand, the lower level demons, they're not very bright."

"If-- I don't want anyone else hurt."

It spread its arms,

"No one else. Scout's honor."

Dean safe. His parents safe. And all he had to do in exchange was give himself up? Something he'd been planning to do anyway. More or less.

"You can go back and hope your powers don't get out of control. Hope some other low level demon doesn't decide to test you. Hope you can live out your life peacefully while your power attracts every supernatural thing within a hundred miles. Doesn't sound fun, does it? I think you know better, or you wouldn't be here right now. You can learn to use it, control it. All you gotta do is let me show you how."

"Where?"

"Cold Oak. I'll be waiting."

Light flashed across Seth's eyelids and he jerked back, smacking his head against the wall.

--

He was lying down, the sun shining through the crack in the wall and blinding him. He sat up quickly, fumbling for the handgun, his back cramped from the cold floor.

Outside, the birds were chirruping. Inside, the devil's trap lay undisturbed on the ceiling and the salt still lined the walls, untouched. He struggled to his feet, tracing the path the demon had

taken across the barn floor but saw no prints in the dust or dirt. Could the thing do that? Cross the devil's trap and leave no traces of itself? Nothing in Bobby's books ever mentioned a demon powerful enough to cross a devil's trap; it had mentioned a few who could destroy one in order to get out of it, but the trap still had to be altered in some way. So the thing hadn't lied. Seth had been dreaming.

He sat back down and yanked the leather bag over. Now was not the time to start doubting his plans. So maybe the thing was more powerful than he thought, maybe it knew him a little too well for comfort. Maybe it was a really stupid idea to walk right into its trap. Seth knew it was a trap, it had to be. But the options haven't really changed despite the new information. Hunt or be hunted. Face the thing on his own terms or have everyone around him get hurt in the process. He'd been afraid to stretch that creepy ass muscle lodged deep in his brain, afraid to find out what it can do. But alone on the road he'd poked around it carefully, like someone might poke an unfamiliar growth. He was pretty sure that the incident in the cabin was only a tip of the iceberg. Obviously, there was no handbook on how to control it, but Seth had found some useful tips in Bobby's library, mostly for those who were telekinetic. Breathing exercises, concentration, focusing the energy, basics. Chances are, if he tapped into it fully, if he reached in and tried to use every bit of that fire, he'd probably burn himself out. And everything else within a hundred mile radius too, like a small nuclear reactor. He'd never heard of Cold Oak, but he'd have to find a way to evacuate the place before the showdown. Maybe a bomb threat?

He found himself wishing he could talk it over with Dean, wishing he wasn't alone. He wasn't fooled by the ridiculous fucking promise that no one else is gonna get hurt. But, he was pretty sure that the thing would hold off for a while. So Dean was safe for now, far away from Seth and the entire demon mess. Dean might have been the one who had set the wheels in motion by kidnapping him, but Seth had no delusions about what things would've been like otherwise. It was starting to look more and more like he was born with a target painted on his forehead.

--

"I don't have to tell you that this is stupid idea, do I?"

"Nope."

The paint was taking forever to dry but Dean was taking no chances. The lines of the trap were thick, massive, taking up all of Bobby's work room from wall to wall. The trap on the ceiling was just as large and dry already. A few more minutes and they'd be ready to roll. There was one last ingredient missing from the bowl, his own blood.

He was calm now. Focused.

"At least wait until Ellen and Mark get here."

"What difference does it make? If the thing breaks free we're all ground meat."

"Demons lie Dean, that's what they do. Even if you can get her to talk, we can't trust anything she says."

"She'll talk. And she'll tell the truth. Or I'll send her ass right back to hell and summon another. I'll summon every last demon I can find if I have to."

"Dean--"

"Got the holy water and the salt?"

Bobby studied him for a few moments. It was look Dean knew very well. The same look Bobby gave him when Dean stole one of his cars at fifteen to drive down to the local strip club. When he came back from killing his first wendigo with his arm hanging useless by his side. When he went after the nest that killed dad with nothing but a machete and a few gallons of gasoline. Like he didn't know whether to kick him or hug him. Like he didn't know what to do with him.

"Yeah," he said finally,

"It's all ready."

"Good. Let's get started."

--

It was nearing noontime when a truck finally pulled over to the side of the road. Seth ran up to it, afraid the guy would change his mind. Between the burning in his feet and the sun burning overhead, the novelty of walking had worn off about an hour ago, leaving him tired and irritable. And anxious. The moment he'd left the barn that morning, he'd felt as if a timer had started up, hurrying him along. He tried to shake it off, blame it on the lack of food and rest. But somewhere deep inside he understood that all those excuses were bullshit. The time leading up to the final showdown was ticking away and it would run out sooner rather than later, whether he was at Cold Oak or not. He knew it the same way he knew that the water was wet and Dean was probably searching for him by now.

"Need a ride kid?"

A creeper. Perfectly normal looking guy, tee shirt, overalls stained with old paint, cleanly shaved, reeking of old spice. But the eyes always gave them away. The guy measured him, weighed him, stripped him and didn't bother dressing him again. Seth was reminded of a quote he read a long time ago, 'When girls are a few, a boy will do.' The guy was so obvious he might as well have it painted on the side of the truck.

Seth flashed his dimples at the guy, pretending he couldn't feel his skin crawl,

"Yes sir, I'd love one."

"Hop on in."

Feeling the comforting weight of the gun in his pocket, Seth climbed into the passenger seat, dumping his bag on the floor. He wanted both his hands free, just in case.

"How far'ya goin'?"

"Cold Oak."

The guy had already pulled back out on the road and the telltale jerk of his foot twitching on the gas pedal was hard to miss.

"Cold Oak? Town's been abandoned forever. What'cha goin' there for?"

"I'm writing a magazine article on abandoned towns. I was coming back from Cayuga when my car broke down. The magazine is sending another one for me but I gotta deadline, you know? Wanna hit up as many places as I can."

"Cold Oak ain't nothin' like Cayuga kid, Cayuga's got people livin' there."

"Just following the list they gave me," Seth said lightly, tapping the bag at his feet.

"Well I ain't going into Cold Oak. I'll get you to the next town down and you can foot it from there."

"Thank you," Seth said,

"I appreciate it."

The guy glanced at him as if wondering just how far Seth's appreciation might go. Seth bared his teeth, not caring if the guy takes it for a smile.

At least he wouldn't have to worry about evacuating the town.

--

"Dean," she sounded surprised.

Can demons even be surprised? He didn't know or care. The colt was tucked in the back of his belt, just in case. He had a bottle of holy water in his hand and another in his pocket. Bobby had gallons of it stacked up in the corner and bags of salt on the desk. Sunlight shone through the study windows, adding patterns to the trap. They'd left the back door wide open as the means of a quick retreat and Dean could hear birds singing outside, like it was any other day, any other morning. It seemed impossible, that the mornings would come and go, that the sun would shine, the birds sing, that everything would go on as it always had when Sam might be dead. It was now over twenty four hours since Sam had gone missing and Dean felt like he was sleepwalking, like the nightmare would never end.

He watched her carefully measure the trap under her feet, above her head. Watched her take in the holy water and the salt and the salt loaded shotgun in Bobby's hands.

She smiled,

"Wow, you really rolled out the red carpet here. I'm flattered. How's your arm? Still limp?"

"Where is my brother."

"Brother?"

She tilted her head, all five feet of her completely relaxed as if she wasn't about to die, as if Dean wasn't on the verge of putting a bullet right between her eyes.

"Is that what he is? Could've fooled me."

Dean's stomach dropped. He'd forgotten that she probably knows, that she had to know.

"Bobby, you should wait outside."

"No, no, let him stay, I bet he'll love this story."

"Shut up," Dean growled.

"We're supposed to be the twisted ones," she said smugly,

"but you sure got me beat with this one. Even I've never fucked--"



The spray of holy water hit her across the mouth and she shrieked, stumbling back. Dean turned to Bobby wondering if the man could read the pure panic on his face, the way his stomach twisted and churned and threatened to empty out. His hand clenched around the empty bottle.

"Bobby, just go. I-- I've got this."

He couldn't read the expression on Bobby's face and he didn't try. It was probably too late. But he wanted to spare the man all the dirty details and Bobby seemed ready to be spared. He left without a word, his back stiff. Dean wondered if it was shock or disgust or a mix of both.

When he turned back to the demon, she was laughing,

"Oh Dean, you should see your face right now. It's priceless."

He took a deep breath and made his way over to the gallons of holy water stacked in the corner.

"I don't know if you noticed, but the paint is waterproof."

He grabbed a jug,

"So you can tell me where my brother is, or I'm gonna dump a gallon after a gallon in there until you're fucking swimming in holy water. Then I'm gonna shove a bag of salt down your throat."

"Are you flirting with me? Really Dean, just because your brother likes things shoved down his throat, it doesn't mean we're all into it."

Clenching his teeth he aimed for her legs, getting a sick wave of pleasure from her screams, from the frantic way she moved around the trap, trying to find a dry spot.

"My brother. Where is he?"

"He's dead," she growled,

"I tore his heart out. But first I put a leash on him and let all my brothers take a turn. He broke so easy it was pathetic."

"You're lying!"

"They took him two at a time, tore him apart, ripped his insides like they were made of butter and he squealed like a pig--"

His hands were shaking so hard that he missed his aim, but the water still sprayed across her face, drowning her words in a screech of pain.

"You're lying. Where is he?"

"I dumped what was left of him in the Big Sioux River," she gasped,

"If you throw a net, you just might catch a few of your favorite bits."

"Where is he?!"

"He's dead. Dead!"

He threw the gallon at her feet and it exploded, bathing her in holy water. The smoke rising from her was now so thick he could barely make out her face. Her screams were echoing in his ears. He wanted to crawl into a corner and throw up. He wanted to carve into her like a steak, slice her apart inch by inch. He wanted to peel the skin from her face and see how long she would still be screaming if he covered each exposed inch in salt.

"He's not dead. Tell me where he is or--"

"Or what? Huh? You're gonna keep me here until the end of time? You can't kill me you moron. I invented torture. Real torture, not this ham fisted shit you don't even have the stomach for. If you send me to hell I'll just crawl my way back out. So what is it that you'll do?"

He pulled the colt out and aimed at her head.

She froze. Tilted her head slightly and moved back an inch, until she was at the very border of the trap. He wondered if it felt like a solid wall or if it hurt to touch it.

"Where did you get that?"

Finally, he could see fear. Well hidden, but still there.

"An old friend. He said it kills demons."

Dean grinned and it felt like a mask on his face,

"I've never heard of such thing, being a ham fisted moron and all, so I figured I better try it out and see if it works."

"The Colt was lost ages ago. That can't be real."

"Well then, what's a bit of ordinary steel between old friends?"

He pulled the hammer back and she flinched,

"Wait. Wait a second."

"You ready to tell me where my brother is?"

"What do I get out of it? If I tell you, you kill me. If I don't tell you, you still kill me."

"You're a waste of a decent bullet and I have a limited supply. You don't tell me, I will kill you.

But if you do," he nudged Bobby's journal with the gun,

"I send you back to hell. You get to try and crawl back out in time to warn your boss I'm coming for him. Fun times for everyone."

"He'll kill me."

"Not if I kill you first."

In a few seconds of silence that followed, Dean could hear his heart beating frantically and the far away sound of an approaching vehicle. Ellen and Mark. He wanted to be done here by the time they arrived. He wanted to be long gone.

"Cold Oak. He's going to Cold Oak. He's probably there right now."

"What's in Cold Oak?"

"Azazel. You know, the big bad who killed your mommy? He's already made contact with your boy, asked him to come and join him. Little Sammy said yes."

"You're lying."

"Not this time sugar, got no reason to lie. Azazel offered to teach him how to control that pesky little problem he's got and Sam jumped at the offer. You know what he is, right? You little 'brother?' That's pure demon blood running through his veins, the same as mine. He's a freak, more demon than human. And you stuck your dick in it. From what I've gathered you've always had questionable taste, but this really takes the cake. You let a demon boy stick his tongue in your--"

The sound of the bullet leaving the colt was surprisingly muted after all the screaming. It struck her in the middle of the forehead where it started to pulse like a living thing, small cracks immediately fanning outward, breaking up her features. At any other time, he would've been proud of making that kind of a shot with his left, but at that moment, all he felt was a twisted satisfaction at the surprise etched in every line of her face. She filled with light, the crack spreading, gaping wide, fire pouring in between them. It didn't last nearly long enough; he'd wanted her to suffer, he wished he'd known how to make her suffer. He wished he'd had the time to torture her for hours, to rip her apart piece by piece. She let out a soft sigh and

crumpled to the ground, the light still pulsing through her, the wound on her forehead turning black.

The rumble of the truck was right outside now, traveling around the house and into the back yard. He took a deep breath, nearly gagging at the thick sulphur smell. His hand trembled, the colt growing heavy. That hadn't been the part of the plan; he'd told her the truth, she really was a waste of a bullet. But he couldn't, he couldn't listen to any more horrifying revelations, didn't wanna know any more. What he knew cut him down to the bone. If he let himself think about it, it would break him.

"Five bullets left," Bobby grumbled behind him and Dean squared his shoulders.

"More than enough."

"Suppose you're right. I don't know about you but I could use a drink."

"How much did you hear?"

"Enough to need a drink."

"She was lying-- about Sam. He never would've said yes to a demon. Never. He's not-- he's not what she says he is. He's not."

There was a short silence behind him before Bobby sighed,

"I don't know what he is. And neither do you. We need to figure this out, make a plan."

"I gotta get going," Dean mumbled, sticking the gun back in his belt.

Should he even bother with the holy water? Now that he knew the gun was a real thing and Elkins wasn't just some delusional nut case, there was really no point in weighing himself down with the rest. He'd take his shotgun, just in case. And as much holy water as he could fit in his flask. He didn't know much about Cold Oak, just the things he'd heard over the years, but he knew he wouldn't be driving into the town itself. The road had crumbled and worn away a long time ago, long before the gates and chains showed up, cutting it off from the curious and the stupid.

"I put a call out to everyone still in the area, they should be here within an hour," Bobby said.

As if on command, the truck engine cut off.

How much did he really hear?

Probably everything. Bobby wasn't stupid and the bitch had been pretty clear. Dean found that he couldn't turn around and meet his eyes, didn't wanna see what was in them. It didn't really matter anyway. Nothing mattered now that he knew where Sam was. Dean would deal with it later or he wouldn't deal with it at all, but he couldn't think that far ahead, couldn't focus past getting to Cold Oak and getting Sam back. Everything else had to wait. If Bobby wanted to disown him, if he wanted to pretend he didn't hear anything, if he wanted to stand on his head and sing Christmas carols in April, Dean couldn't give a flying fuck.

Sam first. Everything else would wait.

"I'm leaving now."

"Not alone."

“Bobby--“

“You’re not going alone.”

“All you’re gonna do is slow me down and get everyone killed,” Dean snapped.

“Too bad. You’ve put me through enough shit for ten lifetimes, I think I get to call the shots on this one.”

Mark stomped into the kitchen, dropped his bag on the table and paused. His eyes flickered over the body on the floor, then over Dean and Bobby.

He licked his lips and squinted,

“Is that a-- dead demon?”

## Chapter Management

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Chapter 18: All the worlds that are and could be

## Chapter Text

It was taking forever, bringing everyone up to date. Dean was twitching like a junkie with his high long worn off. They were wasting time. Every moment they were all sitting here, talking about stupid pointless shit, Sam could be hurt. He could be dying.

“In pairs,” Bobby repeated, a slight tinge of frustration coloring his voice,

“not alone.”

“It’s inefficient,” Brian countered, scratching at the scruff he hadn’t bothered to shave off that morning,

“if we spread out, we could cover more ground.”

Dean wanted to break the guy’s fingers.

“In pairs,” Bobby growled for the third time,

“You’re going in fucking pairs or you can stay here.”

“Fine,” Ellen said, “we’re going in pairs. What if there’s more than one demon there? What if he’s got an army lined up and waiting? We’ll be walking into a trap. Someone needs to get in there and scope the place out first.”

Dean dug his nails into his palm until they broke the skin. He could barely feel the burn of it.

“Stupid idea,” Olivia said lazily, her boots propped up on the table.

Somehow she’d found the time to make herself a cup of coffee and braid her hair. Dean hadn’t showered since the house in Litchfield. He hadn’t eaten since he left Bobby’s two days ago to drive to Colorado.

“If that someone gets caught, we’re screwed before we even start.”

Ellen smiled, an unpleasant stretch of lips Dean was more than familiar with,  
“You’re not supposed to get caught sugar, that’s the idea.”  
“We should definitely have an idea of what we’re walking into,” Mark added quietly.

The demon bitch still lay dead on the floor, in full view of the entire group. No one paid the charred body any mind except for Dean. Every time he saw her he heard the mocking voice echoing in his head, ‘You know what he is, right? Your little ‘brother’?’

“What the fuck does it matter what we’re walking into,” Carl grumbled from the corner. He’d been cleaning his guns silently the entire time. He didn’t even bother looking up as he spoke, like he couldn’t care less if they were paying attention.  
“It’s a suicide mission. If you haven’t figured that out by now, you might as well turn around and go home.”  
“Hold on now,” Bobby said slowly,  
“No one said nothing about a suicide mission.”

Carl slid the chamber back with a loud click,  
“Then you’re all delusional. You’ve got one weapon. Five bullets. If you make each of them count, that’s five dead demons. If I was the big boss I’d have at least a dozen watching my ass. Especially if they were guarding my prize too.”  
He laid the gun down slowly and looked up,  
“We’re walking into a death trap. Don’t get me wrong, I don’t wanna die any more than the next guy, but let’s not pretend we’re gonna survive this. That motherfucker’s pretty powerful.”  
Roy snorted,  
“I didn’t sign up for no suicide mission.”

“Then why the fuck are you here?” Dean growled.  
Seven heads turned in his direction, most of them surprised, as if they’d forgotten he was in the room.  
“Dean,” Bobby grumbled, warning him.

No. He’d had enough of bullshit. He’d had it.  
“I don’t fucking need you. Any of you.”  
He stood up, grabbing his jacket with shaky hands,  
“You’re fucking sitting here, clucking at each other like fucking hens while my brother is out there, all alone. Being tortured. Dying. My fucking brother. My only goddamned family. And don’t you fucking look at me Ellen, don’t you fucking tell me you’d still sit here arguing over bullshit if that fucker had Jo strung up on his rack, if she was the one he was holding prisoner. None of you would. Fuck you. Fuck all of you. I don’t fucking care if you come or go. But I’m going to get my brother back. Right now.”

There was a heavy hush behind him as he stormed out of the house. He didn’t care if they sat there until the world crumbled into dust. If they fucking rotted there in Bobby’s living room. Every

minute he hadn't been moving he'd felt strung tighter and tighter, had gotten closer and closer to snapping. Now that he was finally doing something, the pressure eased slightly, but the urgency was still there. He couldn't shake the feeling that he was already two steps behind something big, something he should've known was coming. That he'd missed something important while they were sitting there arguing over bullshit.

He'd barely managed to stick the key in the ignition when Bobby yanked open the passenger door and got in with a grunt, his duffle clutched to his chest.

"They're coming," he said, chucking the duffle into the back seat.

"How many?"

"All of them. You shamed them into it."

"Good," Dean said coldly, backing out to avoid Ellen's truck.

He could see them now, piling out of the house.

"You know most of them ain't gonna live through this."

Dean knew he should feel guilty. He knew he should. But there was a steady pounding in his temples echoing nothing but Sam's name, urging him to hurry, to move, to get there now before it's too late.

He jerked the steering wheel and peeled out of the yard, rocks flying.

"I don't care."

--

It was the road. It had to be.

The sky was wrong somehow, and he couldn't really explain why because the sky was the sky, and really, how different could it be? But the road was the way it should be, the way it had always been in his dreams. Even though he couldn't pull up a mental image of it, had no dream memory to compare it to, he knew it was the same road, knew it in his bones. And he couldn't begin to guess what that meant. It should be freaking him out, that he'd been dreaming about this for years, about a place he'd never seen before. But he was past being freaked out. In the last week he'd been attacked by vampires and demons, had found out he was a freak, had fallen in love and been pushed aside. If he was honest with himself, this probably isn't even the weirdest thing that's happened to him so far. Although it came pretty close.

The creeper guy had dropped him off at the very beginning of the dirt road, with an invite to meet him at a bar in the next town over. Seth had given some sort of a noncommittal answer, already feeling that timer pick up the pace, as if being closer to the town had sped up the clock. He could barely remember getting out of the truck and crawling under the heavy chained gate. Being on the road, his steps raising small clouds of dust, it felt right. The same way sitting behind the wheel of the impala had felt, Dean in the seat next to him, endless highway stretching ahead of them. He had no doubts any more that he was supposed to be here. No matter what happened, how it all turned out, he was on the right path. If there was such a thing as fate, then this must be carved in deep, this road and the town waiting at the end of it. Maybe

he was meant to die this way, fighting the demon that killed his mother. Maybe this is what it had all been leading up to, his entire life, this one act of revenge. And he found he was all right with that.

Something was missing though. Yes, the sky was wrong, the afternoon sun shining down, bringing out the colors around him. But he found himself glancing to his right often, expecting to see someone walking alongside of him, someone he couldn't remember. Finding nothing but empty space every single time was unsettling. Logically, he knew that there should be no one there. There was no one in the world Seth would want to take with him, no one he'd drag along to this desperate stand off. The only person whose presence would've brought him any comfort was Dean, and Dean was the last person he wanted to see this, the last person he wanted here if Seth managed to level the town. Yet, it kept happening, this urge to look over, to find a presence at his side.

By the time the old town house peaks started showing above the trees, he was tense and anxious. The sense of wrongness had lodged itself deep inside the desire to keep moving forward. He still didn't doubt that he was supposed to be here, but he couldn't shake off the urge to find what was missing first, to track down this mystery person who was also supposed to be here.

He rounded the last corner of trees and stopped, the town spreading out in front of him. Everything else dropped off the radar. Everything else ceased to matter. He was here. He was finally here. And he knew where he had to go now, knew what he was looking for. Because he'd been here before. A million times he'd stood at the same spot, looked over this town, studied the broken windows and rotten porches and the silent windmill in the distance. He knew this town better than he knew himself, knew every rock, every grain of dirt. Nothing was missing now.

He inhaled deeply and stepped forward.

--

"Are you trying to lose them?"

"I'm trying to get there in this fucking lifetime," Dean snarled.

His hands were starting to hurt but he couldn't loosen the grip on the steering wheel. Could barely unclench his teeth long enough to speak. They weren't moving fast enough. Somewhere, probably back at Bobby's house, they'd lost more time than they could afford. Dean knew this. He didn't know how and could not begin to explain it, not even to himself, let alone Bobby. But every instinct screamed that he was already late, that he'd already lost. He ignored it and pushed his baby up to ninety, the road alongside them starting to blur. A sick feeling of dread coiled in his stomach, pulsing in the beat with his heart, with the dull thud in his temples still screaming for Sam.

"If we get pulled over it'll only slow us down."

Dean couldn't stand the calm tone of Bobby's voice, couldn't understand how the man didn't fucking feel it too, this unbearable pressure in the air, as if everything was balancing on the edge, as if the world itself was holding its breath.

"Something is wrong," he said tightly,

"something is happening right now. With Sam. I don't know what and I don't know how I know, but I know. It's bad Bobby. Whatever is happening is really fucking bad. Maybe-- maybe the end of the world bad."

He could hear the words coming out of his mouth and they sounded crazy, anyone listening would think he was crazy. Bobby reached over and put on his seat belt.

"Do you think he could do that?" he said after a few beats, his tone cautious,

"You think Sam could cause that kind of damage?"

Dean wanted to lie. Wanted to say no. This is the same kid who'd said that he only felt right when he was helping people. Who choose to spend his days scraping dead bodies off the asphalt instead of sitting in an office. Who was strong enough to take on a demon but nearly fell apart at having to rob an animal clinic.

But all he could focus on was the way Sam had looked on Bobby's porch, gun steady in his hand, that cold mask fitting so perfectly on his features, a side of him Dean hadn't known was there.

"I don't know," he picked the easiest answer.

"I don't know."

--

The demon was waiting for him. Sitting comfortably in the dirt, leaning on the wall of brick that held up the bell. He looked like he was napping, head thrown back, eyes closed. Seth wasn't the least bit surprised. He was here, the demon was here, the bell was here.

"You're planning to kill me," the thing said, startling him.

It turned its head around, pinning Seth with the yellow gaze,

"A suicide mission? Really Sam? I thought you'd be smarter this time around."

"You thought wrong."

"It won't work."

"You don't know that."

"I do," it got to its feet slowly, like they had all the time in the world.

"I know because you've tried it before. We've done this entire song and dance before, more times than you could count. Would you like to know how many times you've attempted to kill me with your power, right here and now, and failed? Sixty eight times Sam. Sixty eight. That's a lot of failures, even for you."

Seth's hands were turning slippery with sweat,

"I don't understand."

"Of course you don't. But you will."

It motioned to the bell, something in that creepily human expression hinting of impatience,



"You're not just here for me. You know there's something you gotta do first. Go on. Get it over with. The day's wasting."

Seth vaguely remembered putting his hand on the bell, feeling the grooves of the tree carved into its side.

"It's a trap," he said, even though deep down he knew it wasn't, he knew it had nothing to do with the demon and everything to do with him.

"You know it's not," it echoed his thoughts,

"the trap was sprung decades ago and you've already walked into it. This is just protocol."

He approached the bell cautiously, studying the carving,

"What's gonna happen? When I touch it, what's gonna happen to me?"

"Not much. You'll get a little smarter, something I'm certainly looking forward to even if you're not."

He had to do it. He knew he had to even though he didn't know why. By his reasoning, if the demon had wanted to kill him, he'd already be dead. And this felt right too, something he'd done a million times before.

He raised his arm slowly and pressed his hand over the carving. For an instant, a tenth of a second, he could feel the cool grooves of the tree against his palm. Then the reflection of the world shattered.

--

His vision flickered violently.

"Hey, earth to Sam. You awake?"

He blinked a few times, disoriented. He was leaning against a rotting wall, shotgun in his hands. There was a faint glow of light in the darkness, on the east side of the town. The chilly wind snuck under his coat making him shiver. Dean's hand was gripping his elbow. He shook it off.

"I'm fine dude, let go."

He felt Dean pull back and instantly missed his warmth. He didn't like Cold Oak at night. It had been creepy enough during the day while they'd shacked up above the old school house, waiting for dusk. Watching the others take each other out, one by one. There were only two left now, more dangerous than the rest. They knew what the girl could do, they'd seen her in action. Summoning demons with ease, pointing them at others like trained hounds. But the other was still a mystery.

"I still think we should wait and see if they kill each other," he whispered.

Dean shifted impatiently,

"We talked about this already. They've been working together from the start. Just because they killed the others, doesn't mean they'll turn on each other."

"Yeah, ok, but we still don't know what we're up against."

"We got back up on the way. You wanna wait?"

No. He didn't wanna wait. There had been an unsettling sense of urgency pushing him all day and it had only gotten stronger. They had to kill them both, before they accomplished whatever the fuck they were trying to do out here. Had to do it quickly.

"No. Let's do this thing."

"Awesome," Dean said.

Sam could hear the smile in his voice and couldn't help but grin. Leave it to Dean to be excited about this, to be happy about walking into the unknown, about facing things that could easily shred them to pieces. Suddenly he wished that he'd said it more often over the years, that he'd braved the ridicule and the inevitable chick flick comments. There was not a goddamned thing in the world he loved more than his brother, in every possible way, from apple pie normal to so sick and twisted that he never even dared admit it to himself. But he could count the times he'd said it on the fingers on one hand, and it seemed so stupid, such a cowardly thing to do.

"You take the side," Dean whispered,

"I'll take the back."

And then he was moving, running across the dirt road and towards the light.

They'd mapped the road out ahead of time, snaking over the rooftops like thieves, unnoticed. They'd studied the the layout of the townhouse from all directions, even sneaking inside once while the rest hunted their first pray, a thin blonde girl who'd decided to run for it. By the time the others had dragged her corpse back and strung it up on the windmill, Sam and Dean had been long gone, back in the safety of their hiding place.

Now, in the darkness, Sam could picture each porch beam, each line and crack of the place. He slipped in through a side window, the glass of it long gone. He could hear them talking quietly, somewhere to the left of him. Dean should be inside already and moving through the far hallway, Sam could set a compass by him. Everything was going according to the plan. Until the voices fell silent and he heard a familiar scream.

He froze for an instant, fear suffocating him, lodging in his throat. Then he was running through the house, not caring if they heard him, his mind a complete and terrifying blank. He skidded to a stop in a doorway, the light of the oil lamp making his eyes water.

The first thing he saw was the green of Dean's eyes, staring at him from the floor. Sightless eyes, neck twisted so viciously that the bones had warped, protruding from the side. Dean, not breathing, not seeing, already gone. Dean, gone.

He looked up and saw the girl smiling at him, her face surprisingly young, surprisingly sweet.

"Sorry," she said, sounding like she meant it.

An invisible noose wrapped around Sam's throat, tightening viciously. He dropped the shotgun to claw at the empty air, more of a reflex than any real desire to make it stop, to live through this. Dean was dead. Dean. Dead without ever knowing, without Sam ever having told him. Four times in twenty some odd years, Sam had actually gotten around to telling him a tenth of what he felt. And now Dean was gone. Sam was already lightheaded, wheezing painfully, his vision swimming. His legs were the first thing that gave out and he dropped like a stone, feeling numbness creep through his hands and up to his lungs. The last thing he saw was the amulet hanging from his brother's chest.

His vision flickered.

"I should've gone," he said, rubbing his eyes.

"No Sam."

"I could've done something, I could've stopped it."

Dean slammed the shotgun down on the table,

"Stop. Just give it a rest."

Sam looked around the basement, the traps, the salt, the wall of ammunition. He felt sick. He felt like a fucking coward. Hiding down here while people were dying, the world was ending right above their heads. Bobby hadn't checked in since yesterday morning. Dean refused to add him to the body count but Sam knew, he knew the man was dead. He'd already added him to the count in his head, to the list of people that had died to protect him. Mom, dad, Ellen, Jo, Ash, Tim, Olivia, Garth, Carl, Bobby. How many were left? How many were still out there, fighting? How long could this possibly go on?

"I should've gone," he said again, something he'd repeated a dozen times already.

He knew it was driving Dean insane. He knew it and couldn't stop.

"No," Dean growled, lowering himself down where Sam huddled on the floor.

Dean's hands, still faintly smelling of gun oil, cupped his face. He was angry, he'd made Dean angry again. But his hands were still soft against Sam's skin, even as they trembled. Always so gentle with him, no matter how furious he was, no matter what was happening around them. Dean had always saved the kindest, softest part of himself for Sam. Ever since Sam was fourteen, since that first awkward kiss under the cold Montana sky.

"No Sam. Don't say that, don't-- what would I have done, huh? What would I have done if I'd lost you?"

Sam felt his face crumple, turn ugly in between Dean's palms even as Dean was pulling him closer, letting go so he could wrap one arm around his shoulders. He buried his face in Dean's shoulder, into the familiar scent of sweat and leather, feeling like he was drowning, like nothing was right any more, even this thing between them which had always seemed so pure, losing its glow.

His tears were soaking Dean's tee shirt. He felt his brother's lips brush the top of his head, the same way they had when he was ten, thirteen and fifteen, when it seemed like all Dean did was comfort him, lift him up, teach him how to keep going. It wouldn't work this time. It wouldn't work because Sam had dropped the ball, he should've gone to Cold Oak like the rest of them, he should've taken his chances. Instead, he'd hidden like a coward, letting Azazel pick his champion among the ones who came to him. Now the world was crumbling, thousands of demons burning it slowly, and a tiny little secretary from Peoria was clawing at Lucifer's cage, attempting to start the Apocalypse. And the whole thing was his fault.

A dull crash echoed from upstairs and Dean froze with one hand tangled in Sam's hair. They both stopped breathing. A boot scraped above their heads and they untangled quickly, silently, Dean grabbing the shotgun and Sam settling in the middle of the trap, attempting to focus, to breathe. Dean moved to stand behind him and Sam took comfort from his presence, from the long shadow of his brother laying over him, protecting him. The door at the top of the stairs exploded.

He flung the first few against the wall, couldn't get rid of them completely, not while dozens poured down the stairs. Dean's shotgun slowed down a few more so Sam could concentrate, so he could push at that place inside of them, forcing them out and away from their vessels. They worked together methodically, taking out four or five at a time. But the wave never slacked, never stopped. For every five, ten more stumbled down the steps. Sam held them back so Dean could reload. Dean shot so Sam could concentrate. Then they were starting to lag, lose their rhythm. Sam was bleeding. He could feel the warmth of it on his mouth, his chin, dripping down his chest. He was panting with exhaustion, his frantic breaths echoing Dean's. Piles of dead vessels were building up in front of him. First demon crossed into the trap and Sam pushed it out. Two more. Three more. He had both of his hands up now, quivering, trying to hold on to the force inside of him, trying to point it where it should go. But he was so exhausted already, his vision was starting to swim, his chest felt too tight. Dean was now right behind him, the warmth of his legs supporting Sam's weight, letting him lean back. And still, the demons kept coming, never slowing down, not even for a moment.

Sam knew when it was all over. When his body gave up, the thing inside of him flickering out like a candle. He gave it one last push and felt a pain slice through his temple, sharper than any he'd felt before. Something in his brain short circuited and he felt unbearable pressure in his left temple, a creeping numbness that spread quickly. The demon in front of him convulsed, black smoke pouring out of its mouth. Fresh blood poured down Sam's face, a river of salt and heat. There was nothing left. He had nothing left. He watched helplessly as two more crossed the trap. Felt more than saw Dean move around him, step in front of him with nothing but that useless shotgun. Saw his brother's body jerk once, and slide to the ground in front of him, throat gaping wide. Felt despair too deep for words, then welcoming pain across his own throat, more warmth pouring out. He landed on Dean's chest, grateful for that small thing at least, that he got to die in the same place he'd never known anything but love.

His vision flickered.

He couldn't do it.

For a moment there, standing above this stranger he'd actually started to like, he thought he could do it. Thought he could kill someone whose worst crime was trying to survive. But he couldn't. He didn't have it in him. Only weeks ago he'd spared the lives of an entire nest of vampires. Vampires. He couldn't kill an innocent man, a victim of the same circumstances as his own. He felt bad for the guy. Standing there in the darkness, his own blood soaking the ground, he felt pity. They'd all been jerked around like puppets on a string. Pushed in whichever direction Azazel wanted them to go. He'd had enough of being pushed and prodded, he'd had enough of this bullshit plan. He just wanted to be back in the passenger seat of the impala, Dean's obnoxious rock blasting through the speakers, some unknown resting place waiting in the future. He wanted out of this goddamned town. He wanted his brother. He turned away.

Stumbling down the beaten dirt road, he wondered if he could get by the demons while wounded. His arm hung useless by his side and he gripped it with the other to relieve some

pressure. Old habits died hard; he already knew exactly which bones were broken and where. This wouldn't be an easy fix. The guy had shattered quite a few things in there. A trip to the hospital was inevitable at this point but even that was all right, as long as he got out of here. He'd go to the hospital and he wouldn't even bitch about it this time.

"Sam! Sammy!"

Sam stumbled, gasping in relief. Dean was here. Dean had come for him. Now that he could hear his voice, he knew he never doubted, not even for a second.

"Dean!" he called out, turning towards his brother's voice.

Everything was good now. Everything would be fine. Dean would hug him when he saw him, a clumsy tight hug that would probably hurt Sam's arm more. But he wanted that hug more than anything. Wanted to smell Dean's leather jacket, his hair, his breath. Wanted to hear Dean bitch him out for something, anything.

When he saw him, with Bobby at his side, his knees nearly gave out.

"Sam! Watch out!"

The words hadn't even fully registered when a sharp, blinding pain cut across his back. It cut across his stomach, his chest, his legs. Suddenly he had no body from the waist down. The world tilted and he was falling, for some reason he was heading towards the ground. Then Dean's arms were wrapping around him finally, gripping him tight, and he couldn't really understand what Dean was shouting or why was he shouting, but for a moment there he could smell him, he could feel the skin of his cheek rest against Dean's warm palm and it was enough. Even as darkness crept forward, it was enough. He was home.

His vision flickered.

He fought Azazel in the middle of the Cold Oak in a wild storm. Around them, houses crumbled, earth shook and cracked, the sky exploded in thousands of strikes of lightening. He fought until it was killing him, until he couldn't focus, until the ground was black with his blood. He'd lost all hope of winning a long time ago, a lifetime ago. He only did it to buy them time, so the others could get out, so they could get Dean away from here. He stood trembling in a middle of a hurricane he himself created and pulled at the fire, fed it into the battle, let it lash out. He fought while they all died, one by one, all those that had come with Dean to save him, to rescue him, all those that gave their lives for an abomination that he is. He fought until he felt Dean fall, until he sensed the last breath leave his brother's body. And the last thing he heard before burning himself out was Azazel's laughter.

Flicker.

He'd left home, gone to Stanford, left the hunting life behind. Never picked up the phone when Dean called, never tried to call him back. He had a girl he was gonna marry, a full ride to law

school, friends, plans, future. The only time Dean showed up on his doorstep, Sam had no trouble telling to leave. Leave and don't come back. Those were the same words Sam had been given as a goodbye all those years ago and Dean had done nothing to soften the blow, nothing to show that he even cared. Sam was done, he was someone else, going better places. Two years later there was a voicemail letting him know that dad had died. He never called back, never told Jess, buried it all somewhere deep where no one could find it. Shoved it down in the same place where he was rotting, corrupted, the same place where Dean would always be more than his brother. He married Jess, bought a house. A year later, he had a daughter, a tiny little perfect human with a shock of dark hair and freckles across her cheeks. He was close to making six figures a year. Jess was working three days a week at the local library, already round with her second baby, the one they both hoped would be a boy. The night his boy was born, Bobby called to tell him Dean had gotten killed by a nest of vampires. Sam hung up on him before the man was even done talking. He drank three bottles of expensive scotch that night, wondering when was it exactly that he himself had died. The night he left for Stanford? Or sometime later, when he told Dean to leave and not come back? He wrapped his car around a tree two hours later, the crash of metal and glass the most beautiful sound in the world.

Flicker.

He died and Dean sold his soul to bring him back. They had a year together before the hell hounds came to collect their due. Sam spent that year turning over every rock, following every impossible lead, running himself ragged while trying to find a way to save Dean. In the end he failed, as he'd always failed at everything. Dean died in his arms, his body torn to shreds.

Flicker. Flicker.

He killed them all. All of Azazel's children, all the freaks like himself. One by one, he took them all out, even Andy who believed in him until the end, who died with face still frozen in shock. He was it, the heavy weight champion, the only man standing. It was the only way, he'd had no other choice. Their bodies strewn across the ground, broken and twisted. He felt a moment of pity, just a moment, because there was one more creeping somewhere behind him, hoping to catch him off guard. Sam chuckled and lashed out without moving, heard the sharp inhale of breath, heard the body hit the ground. He turned around so he could see which of Azazel's gifted was so stupidly arrogant and saw his brother, the colt still clutched in one hand.

Flicker. Flicker.

He fought, Dean died. He gave in, Dean died. He bargained, traded, begged, Dean died. Over and over again, Dean died.

Flicker.

Dean became a demon and killed him.

Flicker.

Sam ended up in the mental ward at fifteen and Dean was killed by a wendigo.

Flicker.

They killed Azazel with a colt and three months later, Dean was bit by a vampire. Sam killed him, then that same night, put Dean's shotgun into his mouth and pulled the trigger.

Flicker.

John burned on the ceiling and Mary raised them, never telling them that the monsters were real, never teaching them how to defend themselves. Dean got torn apart by a werewolf at some stupid college party. Sam hunted it down and got torn apart himself.

Flicker. Flicker. Flicker.

"Stop it stop it stop it stop--"

He was panting as if he'd run for miles, his head pounding, throat burning. He was on the ground, on his hands and knees, small rocks digging into his palms. He'd thrown up, more than once. There was a pile of vomit in between his hands and he scooted sideways to avoid falling into it. When he looked up, Azazel was crouching near him, eyebrows raised.

"You lasted longer than I thought."

"What-- what was that?"

"All the worlds that are and could be. Neat, isn't it?"

"What-- I don't understand, what does that mean?"

"It means that time is a wheel inside of a wheel, inside a hundred wheels, always turning and coming back to the same place. You don't live once but hundreds of times, and each one of those lives has hundreds of parallels. And in each one of those, you've fucked up and gotten your brother killed."

Sam could still see them all, every single one of them down to the smallest detail, every single time he saw Dean die, felt him die. And they all felt real. They all felt right there, right behind the curtain, so close that he could touch them.

"You know you're about to do it again, right? You should be able to see a pattern now. Dean's on his way here as we speak, right outside the town. He fights me, he dies. You fight me, he dies. You defeat me, he still dies."

"How do I stop it?"

"Easy. Do something you haven't done before. Stop repeating the same old mistakes."

What hadn't he done? He sifted through all those false memories of other lives, through all the scenarios that had played out, through every possibility. It took a while, the memories still raw and nauseating, but Azazel seemed content to wait. Once he figured it out, Sam understood why all the patience, why all the pretense of giving him a choice. Because there was only one single thing he'd never done. Because Sam who had grown up with Dean, knowing Dean, loving him, would've never even thought of it, never considered it. Because Sam who hadn't grown up as someone else had a fear that was as great as the fear of losing Dean, and that was the fear of having Dean hate him. In every life he'd lived and had seen himself live, he tried to save Dean along with the world. Seth, who wasn't Seth any more, would probably never be able to think of himself as Seth again, he was different. He was different because he already knew

Dean didn't want him. He already knew what it felt like to have Dean turn his back on him. He'd lived through that fear and now only carried that final one, the fear of Dean dying. He had none of that desperation to save the world, to save every human being on the planet. He had one basic need; for Dean to live. Nothing else.

He grabbed on to the brick and got to his feet, swaying slowly,

"All right. I get it."

"About time."

"I have questions. I'm gonna need answers."

"I expected no less."

"I want--"

"Sam! Sam!"

His stomach twisted.

No. Not right now. Not here.

"Sam!"

He turned around and there was Dean, in the middle of the clearing, that stupid gun in his hands. The gun that had never, ever done them any good, that seemed now more of a curse than a blessing. He wanted to destroy it. He wished he could go back in time and strangle Samuel Colt before he even made the fucking thing.

"Sam? Get out of the way."

He hesitated, only for a moment, and realized he'd seen this play out too. Bullets wasted and the gun useless. Fighting Azazel in this same clearing, tearing the town apart to buy them time, to get Dean out. Dean dying in the end. Dean always dying in the end.

He stepped sideways, shielding the demon with his body.

Dean stopped. The hand holding the colt wavered.

"Sam?"

"Get us out of here," he hissed at Azazel.

The expression on Dean's face hurt almost as much as seeing him die had. Almost. He could understand why he'd never made this choice before. He could see it now.

"Sam," he sounded broken.

Sam reached behind him and felt Azazel's hand close around his own.

"I'm sorry," he said softly and the world shifted around him.

## Chapter Management

[Edit Chapter](#) [Delete Chapter](#)

Chapter 19: Tracce

Notes:

(See the end of the chapter for notes.)

Chapter Text



"Why did you kill my mother?"

The fire crackled, shooting sparks though the darkness. He'd decided to spend the night in the woods, under the stars, and Azazel hadn't objected. The thing looked at him differently now, less as an annoyance and more as an equal. It was unpleasant but necessary.

"She made a deal," the demon said, settling against a tree.

"What kind of a deal?"

"Your dad found himself dead before his time. Mary couldn't let go of him any more than you can let go of Dean. She made a deal and I just followed the rules. You Winchesters are all about sacrifice."

"She sold herself and me. To you."

"Not exactly, didn't explain to her why you were important. She didn't need to know."

"Where are all the other ones? The kids from the visions?"

"They don't exist in this world. Didn't bother with them this time around. You could say I finally decided to put all my eggs in one basket and see how that turns out."

Sam grunted,

"Seems to be turning out all right for you."

"So far. Now you need to do the rest."

"Like what."

The demon shifted, in those few moments surprisingly human, as if he was trying to find a more comfortable seat,

"Well, for starters, you need to open the gates of hell."

Sam gaped at him,

"You're kidding, right? Do I look stupid? I remember what happened the last time I did that."

"No," Azazel lifted one finger, a teacher correcting a student,

"You saw what happened when Ava opened the gates of hell. An impulsive little shit that couldn't be controlled. You saw what happened when Jake opened the gates too, and that boy was dumber than a bag of hammers. You've never willingly opened the gates."

"How the fuck would it be any different?"

"Because you could control them. Every demon that rises from the pit could be yours, to be used in any way you see fit. Think about it. You could set a dozen of them to watch Dean, to make sure he never even stubs his toe. Your own army."

"Of demons," Sam clarified.

Azazel shrugged, stretching out his legs,

"What difference does it make, as long as you've got a leash on them? They're no worse than pit bulls. Slightly smarter maybe."

"And how do you propose I leash hundreds of demons?"

"Power. Me at your right hand. It'd be easy, like I said, they're not very bright."

It was actually making a creepy sort of sense.

"People are gonna die."

"People are gonna die anyway Sam. You know that, you've seen it happen. Every decision you make, regardless of what it is, always results in people dying. At least this way, you can choose who to save."

"Dean."

Azazel rolled his eyes,

"Obviously."

"My parents. All the hunters."

"All the hunters? That seems a bit excessive. Most of them are gonna be trying to find a way to kill you."

"All the hunters," Sam repeated firmly.

Azazel shrugged,

"They'll be more trouble than they're worth. But fine. All the hunters."

"And I want Mary and John out of hell, I want them in Heaven."

"When you open the gates you'll be letting them out. Heaven will collect those that belong."

Sam took a deep breath,

"All right. What do I need to do?"

--

He could hear them.

On the way back to Bobby's he'd been alone in the car, the music as loud as it could go without blowing the speakers. Loud enough to make it hard to think clearly. He'd vaguely hoped they would all go their separate ways afterwards. Somewhere far away from him.

But no. Bobby's place had apparently become the meeting grounds. That was all right though, because only Dean knew where Bobby hid the good booze. Before Ellen's truck had even made it into the driveway, Dean was out back, warming the hood of the rusty Beetle. Not quite drunk yet, but he was on his way there as quickly as possible.

Two mornings ago, Sam had sat in the same place. Faded blue jeans and a tee shirt stretched tight across his shoulders, the sun catching highlights in his hair. He'd sat there, peaceful, with his cup of coffee, soaking up the warmth. Until Dean came along. Subtle as a hammer.

'What if I want things to go back to the way they were?' he'd said.

At first there were only murmurs. But soon enough he could hear Olivia, the pitch of her voice carrying on the breeze.

"Bullshit Bobby, we all saw--"

What did they see? Not the same thing Dean saw. Because Dean had been so close, almost close enough to touch, to reach out and stop it. Close enough to recognize every shift of muscle under Sam's shirt, every line of his face. Dean saw his brother step in front of a bullet to protect the demon that had killed their mother. Saw him reach for the demon's hand willingly, and let himself be taken.

'I'm only alive when I'm out there in the dirt and the filth with the bleeders and the screamers and the dead. And now here, with you.'

And Dean had believed him.

"You knew! Both of you knew the kid had demon blood in him, that he was fucking dangerous and you never said--"

"--walked us into a trap!"

"Are we rescuing demons now?"

Dean wished they'd close the fucking kitchen window. Wished they would all just go away and leave him alone. The Colt was digging into his back and he shifted on the hood, the bottle almost slipping out of his fingers. He tightened his grip on it. There had been a choice, clear as day. And he knew it, staring into the eyes of a kid, a man that was his brother, that had for a short time, been his entire world. There was always a fucking choice.

He'd made one when he took the kid with him, yanked him out of the ambulance and into the sewers. When he'd shared a bottle with him in that vomit inducing motel room, asked him about his parents, about his life. When he'd tangled his fingers in all that infuriatingly soft hair and kissed him, not caring about the consequences. When he'd faced him out here, two mornings ago, and took the cowardly way out. All a series of choices, leading to that one moment, to that last choice, staring down the barrel of the Colt and seeing Sam at the other end, shielding a demon with his body. Three bullets and it would've all been over. One for Sam, one for the demon, and the last one for Dean. Three bodies in the dirt.

"--could be anywhere, how are we supposed to--"

"Call him. Right now. I don't care if--"

"--can't trust him with this one, you know that."

Dean slid lower on the warm metal, feeling the sharp edge of the broken windshield scrape his skull.

How stupid it all seemed now. How little it mattered. All the stomach twisting guilt, the nausea of knowing he'd fucked his own little brother, the imaginary disgust on the face of a long dead father and a vague fear of judgment from a God who neither knew nor cared. With one cowardly decision he'd doomed Sam. With another, he'd doomed the world. But oddly enough, he only regretted that first one.

'I want the reason I threw my life away. I want you.'

And Dean had said no. Because he'd been too fucking dumb to realize that the kid already had him. No amount of denial would have changed a thing. He was Sam's from the moment he saw him in that ambulance, standing tall and unafraid, pointing a cop gun at Dean's head. Long before he'd tasted him, before he'd opened him up with his fingers and his tongue, long before he'd sunk inside of him feeling like he was finally home. Maybe from the moment dad had thrust Sam's six month old body into Dean's arms, telling him to run and not look back. Maybe from the moment Sam was born. Dean had belonged to him always. He'd just been too much of a coward to recognize it. Until it was too late.

There was a hush inside now. Dean closed his eyes when the screen door creaked. He could muster only slight irritation that they wouldn't even let him mourn in peace. Slight because the bottle was almost empty now, and soon enough, he wouldn't be able to feel much of anything except bone deep sadness. And really, what else should a man feel when he'd truly lost everything?

Was this how Sam had felt when Dean had walked out on him? This dark hole in his chest, impossible to fill with anything, an entire bottle of expensive scotch barely even making a dent in the abyss.

"Ash is on his way," Bobby said,  
"He thinks he can find-- the demon. Track him down."

Dean shifted again and almost slid off. The ground was moving. Too much booze way too quickly. He rubbed his eyes and his fingers came away damp. Had it been raining when he came out here? He couldn't remember.

"You should come inside, before that bottle hits you."  
"Too late," Dean heard himself rasp.

The sun had gone down but he'd warmed the metal with his body and he didn't want to go inside. He didn't want to look at them all. He didn't care what they were thinking, what they had to say, what their plans were. None of that mattered.

"I'm sorry," Bobby said.  
"Yeah," he croaked, "me too."

--

He watched the fog rise above the field, the sky shifting from indigo to pale blue to deep orange right in front of his eyes. As last mornings went, this one was glorious. He hoped Dean was somewhere watching. Not because it would be Dean's last. No, Sam would make sure Dean saw many more mornings like this, years and years of beautiful sunrises and sunsets, long into old age. But he hoped they were sharing this one, across the states, across the country, that Dean was somewhere watching this furious orange dissolving into gold. They'd seen so little beauty together, aside from each other. So much time wasted because neither one had known how short it would all be.

"I need to sleep," he said.  
Azazel was somewhere behind him, maybe watching the sunrise, maybe measuring Sam, it didn't really matter. He wasn't lying. It had been a long time since he'd slept without interruptions, without dreams. His last good night's sleep was in Litchfield, with taste of Dean still lingering in his mouth.

"Not chickening out, are we?"

"I'm still human. I need to recharge my batteries. Hell gates to open, armies of demons to control, all that shit needs energy and I'm fucking tired."

"There's a farmhouse over that hill. The owners-- have decided to go on a vacation."

Sam almost snorted. Once upon a time that would have made him nauseous. But he didn't have it left in him to care. And he hadn't been lying either, he was exhausted down to his bones, his vision swimming.

"Are they vacationing anywhere where I'll be able to smell them?"

Azazel chuckled,

"No. I don't believe so."

"Good. Give me until tonight."

--

Dean nursed a cup of coffee silently, far away from the table and the people surrounding it. They'd been expending so much effort into avoiding his eyes that he figured he might as well make it easy on them. Ash had been the only one who wasn't hell bent on pretending Dean didn't exist. And Ash had nothing to offer but pity. It took all of two seconds for Dean to fervently wish that Ash had decided to ignore him too. He didn't think anything could affect him any more, but he'd been wrong, yet again.

He couldn't see the map but he didn't need to see it. He'd already pieced it together, the moment Ash had started talking. The largest devil's trap the world had ever seen in the middle of Wyoming, lines drawn in railroad steel by Samuel Colt himself. Attracting demons like a magnet.

Was it there to keep the demons out? Or was it there to keep something in? They debated over it furiously, Olivia and Ellen bumping heads as always until Bobby physically pushed his way in between them. Dean only listened with half an ear. What difference did it make? The demon would be there, Sam would be there. Dean had all the information he needed.

He still had the Colt, safely tucked in the back of his belt. No one even noticed when he got up and made his way upstairs. He hadn't planned on bringing anything else with him, but he'd spent the night in his old room, smelling Sam on the sheets and pillowcases. Imagining Sam's body pressed against the mattress, long limbs sprawled out, hair tangled. Sam's filthy, sweaty tee shirt wrapped around his wrist. He'd left it behind, on the floor, in the same place he'd found it. Now that he knew where he was going, how the day would end, he wanted it again.

His own tee shirt went flying into the dusty corner of the room. Sam's was saturated with his scent, so thick that he could almost hear his voice, see the dimples in his cheeks when he smiled. He abandoned the sling too. The time to worry about some bits of shattered bone was long gone. He'd need both of his hands today.

No one noticed him come back down the stairs. No one saw him slip out the front door. By the time they heard the tell tale roar of the Impala's engine, it was too late to try and stop him.

--

The steel groaned again, the earth shivering under Sam's feet. He let go for a moment so he could breathe deeply, so he could focus.

"I told you this isn't necessary. You know what to do."

"I'm surprised you trust me to do it on my own. Because I sure as hell don't trust you enough to leave you out here."

Azazel huffed and Sam grinned. He could exasperate a demon. That was definitely something to put on the list of accomplishments.

He took deep, long breaths, feeling his rib cage expand, feeling the oxygen flood his brain. That had been one of the tricks Azazel had taught him. Simple oxygen. He'd been wasting his supplies before because he hadn't realized that demon blood was different. Each red blood cell of an ordinary human can carry about a billion oxygen molecules. This was basic anatomy and physiology shit Sam had learned in his first year of college. Demon blood though, demon blood was a mutation, each cell carrying dozens of billions or more. And he couldn't be absolutely sure, but he had an inkling that his bone marrow was dumping more red blood cells in his system than was normal or safe for an every day person. It shouldn't matter because he wasn't an ordinary human being and obviously, none of those rules really applied to him. But still, it made him curious enough to regret not having the time to research it properly, knowing he would never get the opportunity to dissect a demon and place his hands on all the differences.

"The sun is going down," Azazel said.

"Good. It would've felt weird, opening the gates of hell in broad daylight."

The railroad tracks glowed. He could feel them, the high carbon steel alloy, hard and sleek. He could almost sense the enormous waves of heat it took to mold them, to make them as flexible as plastic. Over two thousand degrees fahrenheit at least. He couldn't produce that kind of heat. He knew now what he was capable of, how far he could push this thing.

He smiled to himself.

He couldn't melt the railroad tracks. But he could break them.

--

It took a while to map out the graveyard. The fucking place was huge and disorganized, no sense or reason to the layout. But eventually he settled as close to the center as he could. From the top of the mausoleum, he could see in all directions, his vision only slightly hampered by the

nearby trees. The sun was going down and that would make it all so much harder. He only had a limited amount of bullets. But all he had to do was pull off two shots. It didn't matter if there were none left for him; he didn't need special bullets. Dad's old handgun would do the job just as well.

Settling in the corner of the flat roof, he stretched out his legs and rested the Colt against his stomach. It was almost comfortable, watching the day die down for the last time, listening to the far off cry of birds and the rustle of breeze through the leaves.

He'd lived one hell of a life, no questions about it. There were very few memories that weren't blood stained or colored with pain of broken bones and bruises. But all in all, he'd had his share of sex, booze, and rock and roll. More women than he could count, a few people he could always rely on, he'd had his baby that never let him down, and at the end of it all he'd fallen in love. Already, he'd lived longer and gotten more than he could've ever expected. More than he deserved, really. And yeah, maybe twenty four was a little young to take the dive but his life expectancy had always been uncertain. John had lived to see his forties, Bobby and Rufus a decade or more. That shit was uncommon in their line of business. He didn't feel sorry for himself. There were a few regrets, most of them tied in with the last week or so, things he should've done differently, ways this whole thing could've been avoided. But thinking about that crap never changed anything. What's done is done.

Still, maybe it was the setting sun or the hush of the graveyard, or the comforting weight of the Colt against his skin, but he felt melancholy. His fingers gripped the edge of the tee shirt, Sam's tee shirt, and he started humming to himself softly.

"Hey Jude, don't make it bad  
take a sad song and make it better..."

Notes:

The last two chapters are written and being proofread. Thanks for your patience guys, we're finally at the end :D

Chapter Management

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Chapter 20: Time to toss the dice

Chapter Text

"How do I curb the initial killing spree? Before I-- leash them."

Branches crunched under their shoes. Neither one was paying much attention to where they were placing their feet and Sam couldn't remember ever walking across a graveyard with so little respect or consideration for those buried. What a stupid thing, to worry about stepping on the graves. What was an insult to the dead when he was about to unleash Hell on the living? Priorities. He just had to keep readjusting his priorities.

"You don't," Azazel said, "I told you people are gonna die no matter what."

"Yeah, I get that, but can we at least--"

"No. We'll have to put the fear of God in them to control them, but in the meantime, people are gonna die. There's no way around that. Listen," he gripped Sam's shoulder and Sam fought the urge to shake him off,

"once you open the gates, you're not just releasing the demons. You're letting out all those trapped below who rightfully belong in Heaven. You'll be freeing souls of the innocent. There's a balance in this. Might not look like it," he took his hand away,

"but there's always a balance."

Maybe there was. Sam couldn't be sure. All those lives he'd lived, all those different scenarios, they'd started fading as early as the night before. They were just shadows of memories now. He'd held on to what he thought was important, held on to it as tightly as he could, all the scenarios related to this, to now. Maybe he'd never opened the gates of Hell himself but it seemed to him now that the world was a flexible thing, always curving into the familiar. Some routes were etched so deep that the time kept slipping into them despite the small changes made, like rain that always makes its way into a riverbed. So he kept what he could of the graveyard, the gates, Azazel himself, and hoped that those things he'd let go of would turn out to be unimportant.

"And there it is," Azazel said.

He didn't need Azazel to point it out to him. He'd recognize the gates anywhere. Had seen them in millions of different lifetimes. Had touched them thousands of times, always to close them, never to open. If he was going for something he'd never done before, this was it.

--

Dean had seen them coming. On his stomach, spread out flat on the stone surface, he listened to the murmur of voices moving closer and closer. The night had just barely settled, heavy and thick. He'd need them close to aim. He'd need them practically under his nose.

"--not all of them."

"Just a few hundred. A few hundred is enough for an army. Plus, there are a few that are-- dear to my heart. Once they're out you can close the gates."

"And they key? Is it on its way?"

That was Sam. Dean's stomach clenched tightly and he bit the inside of his mouth to stop himself from making any noise. Sam still sounded exactly the same. Dean wasn't sure what he'd expected, but it wasn't this. That same little tilt at the end of a question, so clear that Dean could picture Sam's face, the hair in his eyes, the small wrinkle in his forehead. There was bile in the back of his throat. His hands were starting to shake. Doubt flooded him, a million different reasons why he shouldn't do this, why he didn't want to do it. Would it truly be so bad? Sam was still human. It was impossible to hear that voice so clearly and not imagine that there must be some small piece of Sam he knew in there. Some small piece that Dean could appeal to, could reason with. Sam had cared about him at one point. Might still care. Maybe they could-- maybe there could be some sort of a compromise.



It was slightly horrifying, the direction in which his thoughts were taking him. What was he really fighting for here? To save the world? He didn't know what he was saving it from or what he was saving it for. Doing the right thing had become warped years ago, long before dad died, long before he started considering civilians in his way nothing but collateral damage. What was one cop's cracked skull against the need to take down a bloodthirsty nest? What was a dozen dead hunters against taking down a demon? And what the fuck was the world worth, in all its festering filth and misery when stacked up against his brother's smile, against Sam's fingers cupping Dean's cheek? What was he saving? What was he fighting for?

"It's already here."

"Already here?" Sam sounded genuinely surprised.

"It's been here all day."

"All right, where is it?"

"Dean," Azazel cooed,

"You might as well come on down. If you didn't shoot your baby brother by now, you just don't have the balls for it."

--

For a moment there he thought that was just a really bad joke. Demon humor and all. He was ready to laugh at it, funny or not, when Dean appeared on the roof of the mausoleum, his outline clear against the darkening sky. The Colt clutched in one hand, pointed at Azazel. Deja vu all over again. What was that thing he'd been thinking only minutes ago? Grooves in the existence, time returning to the well worn paths despite the changes made. He shifted cautiously to shield Azazel again, knowing it might not work this time, that the element of surprise was long lost. The rules had changed since the last time he'd stared down the barrel of that goddamned gun.

"I thought you said one of your demons was bringing it," he snarled at Azazel without turning around,

"We had an agreement."

Azazel sighed. Sam could feel his breath brush the back of his neck. Even in the darkness and despite the distance between them, Sam could see the hand holding the Colt shake. Dean wasn't shooting yet. Small blessings. It was time to recalculate everything.

"He was already on his way here with the Colt," the demon said, sounding bored,

"What difference does it make how it got here?"

"What difference does it make? He dies here! You die here! We all die here, I remember that much."

"He's not gonna die here. Nobody's dying, just relax."

Dean cried out softly, his arm jerking. The colt flew like a rock, hitting the ground in front of Sam with a soft thud.

"See?" Azazel said,

"He wasn't gonna shoot. As a matter of fact," he moved to Sam's side, their shoulders brushing, "he's thinking he might just let the world go to hell for you. Am I right Deano?"

Sam could see Dean shivering now, at the very edge of the rooftop. He couldn't see his face in the darkness and a part of him was perversely glad for it. Because this was so far off the reservation he couldn't even imagine the outcome.

"What do you say kid?" Azazel went on,

"Doesn't sound like a bad scenario, does it? Sitting at Sam's right hand for eternity, getting your ears scratched whenever you want? You don't care about this world, not any more. It's never been about all those pesky people anyway, it's always been about Sam here, even before you knew he was alive."

Sam picked up the Colt slowly, eyes locked on the shivering form, wishing Dean would say something, anything. Wishing he would deny it. Where was that cocky attitude, that crooked smile?

"Come on down Dean. If you fall, Sam's gonna be pretty upset and he's got work to do. Don't make this hard."

Dean turned around and disappeared. Sam clenched his fists tightly, the metal of the Colt still warm from Dean's grip digging into his knuckles. Let him be smart enough to run for it, let him just take off into the night, far away from here. This wasn't right. He couldn't see it play out, he couldn't imagine where it would end, but it wasn't right.

"Ah, there we go," Azazel said, the smile in his voice hard to miss.

Dean was coming towards them slowly, gaze focused somewhere beyond Sam, giving nothing away. He wasn't wearing his sling; the idiot had probably decided he didn't need it any more even though Sam had told him, more than once, that five weeks was the minimum. He wasn't wearing a coat either. No pockets loaded with salt or holy water, no extra weapons hidden from the sight. Like a lamb going to slaughter. Stupid. Stupid and beautiful as always, jaw hard and tight, every inch of him tense and still shivering. His tee shirt sweaty and stained, wrinkled at the bottom as if he'd been gripping it for hours.

Sam's tee shirt.

"Good boy," Azazel practically purred,

"And you won't be giving any trouble right? This is delicate work, we don't want Sam getting hurt."

Dean's eyes met Sam's, just for an instant, long enough for Sam to read numb resignation, an emotion that he in no way associated with Dean Winchester, with the man who had faced vampires and demons, who'd said no to him only two days ago with simple and unwavering finality.

"No trouble," he said quietly.

“Good. Well that’s settled then. Sam? Ready?”

Sam gripped the Colt tighter and looked away from Dean’s eyes.

“Yeah,” he said, “let’s do it.”

Later he wouldn’t remember those ten steps he took to the gates. Not walking them, not the feel of his shoes across the ground or the mausoleum looming closer. But he could remember Dean walking alongside of him, the heat wafting off his body, the smell of that filthy tee shirt. And that one moment, when Dean’s fingers brushed the back of Sam’s hand. As if he were saying it was all fine, it was all good, nothing really mattered now when the choice was made. They were both there, there by each other’s side and the world could just go to hell, it could crumble into nothing. He knew he’d remember that moment for the rest of his life. Because it was everything Dean didn’t say, everything he’d probably never say. Not just resignation, the acceptance of this fucked up outcome of the whirlwind that had been the last two weeks of their lives. But the simple assurance that the no had actually been yes all along. That it would always be yes, even faced with Hell, faced with almost certain death.

Azazel didn’t need to tell him where, in the intricate pattern of the door, the Colt belonged. Sam could’ve done this whole thing blindfolded. There was a faint click when the barrel found its home, then a whisper of gears turning, creek of old metal, groans of hinges older than time. And even with all those noises, Sam still heard it, the tell tale click of a hammer being drawn back.

He turned around slowly.

Eight. Eight different guns pointed at him. Not just the good old salt shotguns but regular handguns and rifles, loaded with steel.

The reality curving into the lines it knew, folding into the familiar.

He’d never met them, aside from Bobby, but he knew them all. Ellen and Carl and Olivia, and all the rest. He knew them because he’d saved them and had gotten them killed so many times, he could picture the blood stains each one of them would leave behind. And he’d killed them himself, more than once.

“Step back from the gate,” Bobby said coldly, his salt loaded shotgun aimed at Azazel. And just like Sam had moved earlier to shield Azazel with his body, so Dean moved now, stepping in front of Sam.

“Too late,” Azazel said, his grin lazy and careless.

And why not? None of those guns, salt or otherwise, could hurt him. They all must have known it, yet the line never wavered, as if they planned to overwhelm them with sheer power of will. So stupid. Sam should’ve considered it might play out this way, but he’d been so sure, so fucking certain that this time would be different.

The gate was groaning behind them. Any time now, a few more turns, a few more rusty hinges.

Back in college, Sam had been forced to take an extra history course. It was an elective, one of those hybrid courses, entitled The Great Battles of The Ancient World. The professor had come highly recommended and the class had been worth three credits he desperately needed to finish off the year. He barely remembered any of it; most of the lessons had turned out to be dry and factual, the textbook reading like an owners manual. But he did remember one quote in particular, by some great battle commander at the turn of the eighth century. Everything always changes, and the best plan lasts until the first arrow leaves the bow.

The shotgun blast threw Azazel back a few measly feet, if that. The second hit an invisible wall, half a foot away from Dean's chest. Sam stretched slowly, breathing in the night air.

It was time to toss the dice.

--

Dean actually twitched, almost stumbling back into Sam. It had been Olivia, of course. Not that it mattered now, they were all shooting at once, like idiots. Whatever it was that had stopped the first blast from hitting him was having no trouble stopping the rest. But really, he'd never done anything to the girl. She couldn't give him the benefit of the doubt before shooting?

Sam's palm brushed the back of his spine and he shivered, watching the impossible. There was a faint shimmer in the air where the bullets stopped. Salt worked a little better, he could tell from the skittering across the invisible wall, the slight waver of its surface. Whatever that shit was, Sam was holding it steady. And it didn't like salt. It didn't like salt cause Sam was the one doing it and Sam was half demon, and why was he even thinking about that right now? Shouldn't he be doing something?

The gates shrieked, the ground trembled and God help him, it was happening, the doors to Hell were opening. He reached behind him and latched on to Sam's jacket, the leather worn and familiar under his fingers. Sulphur saturated the air. Black smoke enveloped them only for an instant before it was pushed back. He felt Sam tremble and wondered if it was even possible, this thing he was doing, two walls up at once, one to shield them from the demons and another to shield them from the bullets. He could see the insubstantial forms strike the outside wall again and again. But just like it had kept the bullets out, it was keeping the demons in.

Not all of them. Either Sam could not hold them or they'd found some way to slip past, but he saw the hunters scatter, saw Ellen fly across the graveyard, almost graceful until her back hit a tree trunk and she slid down boneless. Why was Sam holding them back? Isn't this what he'd come here for? What it had all been leading up to?

Sam leaned in closer, his breath bathing the side of Dean's face,  
"Go. Get ready to close the doors."

He didn't notice that he wasn't moving until Sam pulled on his wrist and pushed him towards the gates. And even then Dean stood frozen, watching the deep red glow spew forth more demons

than he ever could have imagined. Was this what Hell looked like? All the screams and the fire and the tar-like smoke pouring out in waves, never stopping, never even slowing down? Azazel was moving towards them, his mouth open, but all the sounds were drowned out by the inhuman shrieks and the hurricane of black clouds frantically beating themselves against the walls. Sam pushed him again and his legs finally started carrying him toward the gate when every instinct screamed to get away from it. Was he supposed to close that? How? Was it even possible? He felt like his ears were bleeding, like his head would explode. Has any human come this close to Hell itself and survived?

Sam still held the shield around him. There were things beating against it, so much darkness that he lost the sight of the gate itself twice before he finally found the steel under his hands. His palms slid against the grooves and markings, frantically searching, the glow of the hellfire doing nothing to improve the fucking visibility. He could be standing at the very edge of the pit right now and never know. His knuckles bumped against something curved and large and he grabbed it without thinking. His eyes watered, his nose was running, there was heat pouring over him, dry and scorching. The thing he grabbed slid out easily and he felt the familiar shape of the Colt's handle. He had it. He had the fucking thing. Now if he just dug in his heels and pushed, maybe he could get at least this side closed, maybe he could staunch some of this flow. He'd barely managed to lay his hands on the gate again before the shield disappeared, heat crawled up his throat and something slammed into him, knocking him down.

--

Lillian had had all sorts of quirks, but Sam's favorite had been her tendency to latch on to something new every two weeks, like clockwork. His dad had called it squirreling, as in 'there she goes squirreling again.' Painting, sculpture, gourmet baking, watercolors, karate, jewelry making, interior design, bird houses, welding, she would latch on to each one, mastering it in record time, sometimes dropping it as soon as she was proficient but more often than not, keeping at it until something new came along. It had been exhilarating to watch. And intimidating. At least until she'd taken up knitting. For some reason, knitting had been that one thing she could just not get the hang of. It had been sort of funny, to Sam, to watch someone who had only the month before translated Farsi without a hitch, unable to make a scarf without one end of it two inches smaller than the other. And she'd tried, God did she keep on trying until Sam found himself unconsciously grinding his teeth every time he heard the click of her knitting needles. But she'd never really mastered it. It was just one of those things she'd had to abandon eventually and no one had been allowed to mention again. Sam had never said anything about it, but the whole thing had looked pretty easy from his end.

Standing in front of the gates to Hell, feeling the heat beating at him, he wondered if he'd somehow made the connection even back then. Because this thing he was doing right now, this was like knitting sixteen sweaters at once. Blindfolded. It was the only description that would even come close. Because he couldn't even see half of the things he was doing. He couldn't see the length or the width of the wall he was holding to trap the demons in. He could barely feel the shield he'd made around Dean, stronger than the wall because it had to be, but at the same

time less stable because the heat from the gates was beating against it. There was also the oxygen he was feeding inside the walled off space, for himself and Dean. It had taken him a minute or two to figure that one out, and during that time a few demons had slipped through the cracks. Then there was the shield around him, weaker than all the rest because he wasn't sure if it was necessary. Could he even be possessed? It was too much of a risk to drop it and find out. And on top of it all, he'd stretched out a tentative arm of power to push at the gate opposite Dean. It was no surprise that he was bleeding already, even with all the practice, even though he knew now what he was doing and how to do it. It was just too much all at once. So when Azazel pushed at him, wasting no time, something had to give. He dropped his own shield, figuring that was the one he could do without. He remembered how strong Azazel was, all those other lives had prepared him for what was coming. What he hadn't expected was for Azazel to strike at the tentative hold he had on Dean, to shatter the shield Sam had been protecting him with, to cut off the oxygen Sam had been feeding through the heat and the clouds of sulphur.

One moment he could still feel Dean, feel his exhilaration at having found the Colt, an exhilaration that filled Sam's stomach with dread. Intent on closing the doors, just because Sam had told him to, not understanding what he was doing or why he was doing it, but determined to get it done anyway. Stubbornness and purpose and unwavering faith in Sam, even though, for all he knew, Sam was about to doom the entire world to hell. And in the next moment, he was gone. Just like that. Snuffed out. Broken or dead or suffocating or falling into the pit and shrieking all the way, Sam couldn't tell any more.

He screamed in fury. The earth trembled under his feet, the stones cracked, the demons falling back and away from him with shrieks of their own. Lightning struck the nearby tree and it exploded in a shower of flames. Another struck somewhere behind him, so close he should've been able to feel the blast. The air crackled around him, charged and buzzing. And Azazel was still moving closer, beating at the wall Sam had put up, beating at the tentative hold he still had on one of the gates, whatever power he had slamming against Sam's like a hammer, every hit echoing gong-like in his ears, making it harder and harder to concentrate. He was vaguely aware that he was gushing blood now, that it was pouring steadily down his clenched lips and chin, and he felt bad for making fun of Lilian, for the first time he genuinely felt rotten about it, because this whole knitting sixteen sweaters blindfolded thing was not working out quite the way he'd planned. Maybe this scenario had never happened before, maybe it was all new and uncharted but Sam knew how this was gonna end. He'd lost Dean and now he was fighting with the last bit of strength he had left and it was a familiar scene even if the background was different. No matter what details were altered, no matter how many small changes he made, he always ended up here.

--

That fucking hurt. It felt like someone had ripped his eyeball right out of its fucking socket. Some fumbling determined that the thing was still there and attached but definitely out of commission for a while. At least the other eye was still working. He'd managed to land on his injured arm

and that was screaming holy hell too. So he was one eyed and one armed, in a middle of a battle for Hell's gates. If his head wasn't ringing alarmingly, he was pretty sure he could come up with a decent joke here. Or was there already a joke? Something like 'one armed, one legged man walks into a bar?' He tried to inhale deeply and choked, sputtered, his chest clenching alarmingly. Maybe he should save the jokes for later, when he could actually breathe or stand. Whatever he was inhaling wasn't air and his lungs didn't fucking like it one bit. His stomach spasmed with the urge to expel everything, not that there was much in there to expel. He struggled to his knees, fighting the urge to dry heave. At least he still had the Colt. He'd landed right on it, as well as his crippled arm. The thing had been digging into his hip bone for a while now and it would probably leave yet another bruise. He looked around, silently cursing the blind spot he now had, and froze.

The earth was burning. All around the mausoleum, maybe the entire graveyard, flames raced each other. Bolts of lightning struck the ground, making it shiver. The mausoleum itself was close to crumbling, the stones groaning, deep cracks running up its walls. The gates gaped wide open but the doors were starting to warp and Dean felt faint fear for the first time since he decided to just roll with this, to just let Sam do whatever he was gonna do. The wall Sam had put up was still standing, except now Dean could see that it wasn't really a wall, it was more of a dome, holding them all in. The black smoke had retreated, hundreds of demons probably, all pushed back so far that Dean could only see their furious mass at the far end of the domed space. At any other time he would've laughed. It looked like they were all huddling together in fear, the waves of black boiling, folding on each other, as if none of them were eager to be at the forefront. And Dean could see why. Because Sam was hovering. He was fucking hovering a foot off the ground, in the middle of a cyclone of air, arms spread wide, a pool of his own blood under his feet. The air around him shimmered and snapped, hundreds of small white fireworks exploding, hair wild and alive, face smeared in crimson. Across from him stood Azazel, his back to the gate. Flinching every second or so, as if something was slamming against him, pushing him back towards the pit. It looked like Sam was beating the fuck out of him, or however that whole thing worked. He couldn't begin to guess what was actually happening. But he did know two things. Sam was bleeding and Dean had the Colt. Dean had the Colt and no one was looking at him, everyone had forgotten about him, and that was the dumbest mistake any of them had ever made cause you don't just fucking knock Dean Winchester down and forget all about him. One eyed, one armed, or whatever.

It was a bad distance for his left. He considered trying to get the right arm up but the thing was just gone from the shoulder down and he had no time to fuck around. He did have five bullets after all. And it was only twenty feet or so, maybe thirty. He'd made a worse shot half blind. Which was good because he was half blind. Five bullets, three tries to go at most. He aimed carefully, settling on a spot behind Azazel's ear. Pulled the trigger. Watched it hit the target so smoothly that even dad would've been proud. Had two seconds to grin because, goddamn, he was one hell of a fucking shot. And then the dome exploded.

For his tenth birthday John had decided that it was past time they took a few days off. It had been a birthday surprise, one of the rare ones. They'd driven through Indiana and into Illinois, no hunt scheduled, no rush to cover the distance. Somewhere outside Stockton John had found a campsite, out of season and nearly empty. Dean had forgotten the name of it; it had slipped away over the years, but he remembered that they had set up their tent next to the Catfish Creek, which had been endlessly funny, considering that there was no catfish to be had. For two solid days, they'd done nothing but fish and play poker, the loser stuck with the small pointless chores Dean did gladly anyway, even though he'd won more than he'd lost, even back then. In the evenings, they'd sit in front of the fire and for once, John hadn't grilled him on various ways to kill things, to hunt things. For forty eight hours on his tenth birthday, Dean had been a real boy. Not just a wooden frame designed for one purpose only, not his dad's little soldier, not an inconvenience or a hero in the making. Just a kid tossing stones in the creek, watching the fog rise in the mornings and the sun set at night. Lying in the grass still wet from the dew, eyes closed, sunlight burning his eyelids. Hearing the snap of dad's fishing line and the faint creek of the canvas chair every time he shifted. Only years later he figured out that he'd been happy. That it had been one of those rare times where he could put the feeling into words and say, that was it, those were the hours, the minutes, the days I was genuinely happy.

## Chapter Management

[Edit Chapter](#) [Delete Chapter](#)  
Chapter 21: After

## Chapter Text

Sam hit his limit at seventy four hours. Bobby had gone somewhere, God knows where, Sam wasn't paying attention nor did he care. Maybe home to change or eat or sleep. Sam hadn't slept since they'd struggled Dean into the emergency room three days ago, barely breathing, pulse so faint that Sam kept losing it every few minutes the entire frantic ride to the hospital. He wouldn't let them touch him until Dean was out of surgery. Full twelve hours he'd sat in the waiting room covered in dried blood, head pulsing. Thinking about irrelevant things, stupid things, how Dean was still wearing his tee shirt, how his face had looked, stark white against the scorched ground, how he would be so pissed when he finally woke up and found out one of his eyebrows had burned right off. They'd had to cut the ring off his finger. One of the nurses had handed it to Sam, still flecked with blood. They didn't know what to make of him and he couldn't care less. Bobby had produced some paperwork that showed Sam was Dean's brother, even though the names on the cards were different and Sam kept forgetting what his name was supposed to be. Apparently they were both from Arkansas of all places and Bobby was their uncle. It was just stuff to mull over pointlessly while he waited so he wouldn't scream.



Once Dean was out of surgery, he'd let them do whatever they wanted. Two days later he was wearing scrubs because he refused to leave the hospital and they'd set up a cot for him in Dean's room, not that he had any intention of sleeping. The copies of his scans sat crumpled in the drawer of Dean's nightstand. Bobby wouldn't let him throw them away at first, and afterwards, he'd forgotten all about them. Small TIA, that was all. They gave him blood thinners and he chucked them in the trash when they weren't looking. How the hell was he supposed to explain that the blood clot which had caused all the damage had been supernatural in nature? And the damage was unimportant anyway. Some memory issues. Coordination and all that crap. It could've been worse. He could've been dead. He could be lying in the hospital bed like Dean, tubes sticking out of every hole, needles up and down his arms.

Dean would be fine. No matter how many times he asked, they said the same thing. He'd read their charts and progress notes. Bobby had finagled that one too, with more forged paperwork. The arm would heal. Dean's vision would come back. The internal damage was minimal, just a lot of bruising. It had been touch and go with his kidneys. They had been afraid of brain damage. Which should have been comical in the end because there was nothing wrong with Dean's brain, it was Sam that came out of this a little slower, the abbreviations on Dean's med chart dancing in front of his eyes, the words escaping him, some things just hovering right out of reach. He would wake any day now, they'd said, and Sam waited. And waited. And waited. Somewhere around the seventy four hour mark he finally went under, still in the chair by Dean's side.

He didn't dream.

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He felt the callused finger tips moving across the back of his hand over and over again, exerting no pressure. At first he saw the gates ahead, Dean by his side, Dean's fingers brushing his. Blinked at the white light and white walls. Frowned. Another thing he would probably have to get used to, these slow and lazy moments of disorientation, his brain simply not running as fast as it used to, not connecting the dots quickly enough. The fingers moved again and he looked down.

Dean smiled. One eye still bandaged but the other clear and green and cautious despite the smile. He'd stuck one arm through the rail, the IV lines pulled tight, and his fingers were brushing Sam's hand slowly. His lips dry and cracked, the nasal cannula still in place but slightly crooked now that his head was turned to face Sam, his nose red and irritated from the constant blast of oxygen. The bruise on his face had started fading slightly and it looked painful to smile. But he was smiling still and Sam found himself smiling back, all his facial muscles aching.

"Hey," Dean rasped, voice barely above a whisper.

"Hey," Sam said back, his throat locking up.

"You're ok."

"Yeah," Sam said, his voice hitching, all his efforts to smooth it out failing miserably,

"You too."

Dean grunted softly,

"I don't know man. Pretty sure... there's a tube up my dick."

Sam snorted out a painful laugh, his chest quivering, then he was sobbing, clutching Dean's hand through the rail.

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He had Bobby help him sit up, even though it felt like all his bones would shatter. He kept his thumb away from the morphine pump and decided to just grind his teeth instead. He'd get his two hits later, when it was time to sleep, but now he wanted his head as clear as it could get. Sam was asleep finally, ridiculously long legs folded up on the cot, one arm thrown over the edge, reaching towards Dean even in his sleep. He looked like hell, sallow and bruised around the eyes, the bones of his face sharp enough to cut glass. Bobby was quick to explain that they couldn't get him to sleep or eat the entire time Dean was out. It had made Dean furious, so angry that he'd almost thrown something at the sleeping form, ready to rip him a new asshole for being a fucking idiot. It didn't last long, the anger.

He straightened out the crumpled forms and scans, despite having memorized every word and image. Bobby had pushed the entire mess at him with an assurance that it wasn't as bad as they made it sound. And that was a pretty hefty lie. Dean didn't understand everything; some of those goddamned terms he would need a dictionary for. But the things he understood were cold and clear: balance, coordination, memory, concentration. They were to expect all sorts of things, from emotional outbreaks to unexplainable fatigue and frequent headaches.

"Most of it will go away," Bobby whispered, "in time."

What he meant was, be fucking grateful. Be fucking grateful that this is all there is, because he could've been dead, he could've been lying cold somewhere right now, gone for good. At least Dean understood that much. Watching Sam's chest rising slowly, his eyelashes trembling, he understood gratitude.

"What happened? After."

And Bobby told him, his eyes straying to Sam often as if he couldn't believe the thing he witnessed was lying only a few feet away, fragile and nearly shattered. There wasn't much to tell. Fire and lightening and earthquake until the dome combusted, an explosion that had sounded like the breaking of the world. Demons maybe dead, maybe loose on the world, impossible to tell. Where the gates had been, nothing but a rubble of stone and melted steel, sealed for good now, no place to insert the key. And Sam walking out of the flames with Dean in his arms, incoherent and bloody, stumbling and tripping, left leg folding on every other step. Mumbling about time and existence and grooves and riverbeds. Bobby had been sure the kid's head had cracked like a melon in there, his brains permanently scrambled. He'd been happy to be proven wrong.

"I was sure--" Bobby started and stopped, clearing his throat gruffly.

Dean bit his lip and looked away. That was one thing he'd never say out loud because no one would understand. Because to him, it didn't really matter. Whatever Sam had been trying to do, whatever his plans had been, whether they succeeded or failed. He'd made his choice in that

graveyard and Bobby knew it. He chose Sam. If things had turned out differently, he might have been sitting at Sam's feet right now, getting his ears scratched while demons overran the world. And he would've been content with that too. Bobby could believe whatever helped him sleep at night. But Dean would always know the truth. That he'd been ready to let the world burn for his brother, and that he would do it again, in a heartbeat.

At least it was over now. For both of them. Azazel dead, gates closed for good, and Sam... whatever was left over, they would deal with it together.

## Chapter Management

Edit Chapter Delete Chapter  
Chapter 22: Epilogue

### Notes:

(See the end of the chapter for notes.)

### Chapter Text

6 months later

Dean was trembling. He'd insisted on complete darkness and Sam had agreed readily, knowing this was something frail, something as foreign to Dean as the life they were now living. He could still see him, the shape of his curved back, the fingers clenched around the headboard post. He stroked one trembling thigh as if soothing a wild animal, the muscles jumping under his hand. The first time they'd done this, all those months ago in Litchfield, Sam hadn't thought about it, hadn't planned it, had operated purely on instinct. They'd both been exhausted and hurt and desperate. He remembered it through a fog, the shock coursing through Dean when Sam's hand gripped him tightly enough to hurt, the way his body reacted when restrained, having to accept only what was given and nothing more. He remembered the taste of him, the tight heat around Sam's fingers.

"Sam," Dean whispered.

But Sam wanted to look first, to imprint every detail into his memory. Knees spread wide, toes almost delicately folded, vulnerable and exposed. Already hard, even though Sam had barely touched him yet. He scraped his nails across one thigh, lightly, and felt goosebumps rise, delicate hairs tickling his fingertips. Dean gasped, knees sliding open a little more.

There was finesse in this Sam wasn't sure he had. But Dean had asked. Fidgeting and not meeting his eyes, face furiously red, words spilling over each other so fast that Sam was forced to pick apart the jumble on his own. He wanted to try again, that thing they did once. So grateful that he didn't need to say more, didn't need to specify, that Sam understood.

Lips brushing over the curve of the spine, Sam inhaled the scent of metal and fire, so familiar now, like his own skin. Let his tongue trace the cleft lightly, barely touching. Dean's hips pushed

back, searching for more, and Sam didn't hesitate. The sound of his open palm against Dean's cheek echoed against the walls like a shot, hard enough to make his palm sting. Dean jerked. A moan ripped out of his throat.

"I told you not to move," he said calmly.

Sam had done his research afterwards but it had all seemed so extreme. Whips and chains and safe words. He bookmarked a lot of it because he couldn't be sure where it would all lead, how much is too much or not enough. But he thought he grasped the idea behind it, the strength it took to surrender so completely.

He rubbed the skin still warm from his palm and Dean gasped, his cock jerking, pre-come dripping on the sheets. This time, when he buried his tongue in between the cheeks, Dean stayed completely still, a small pitiful whine quickly muffled by a pillow. He tasted exactly the way Sam remembered, musky and bitter and intoxicating, the tight ring of muscle spasming against his lips. Digging his fingers in the soft flesh, Sam spread him open and held him there, flicking the tip of his tongue around the muscle gently, knowing how excruciating it must be, this slow teasing, the light pressure, being so exposed and restrained from searching for more. Listened to the choked off sounds and creak of leather, lazily increasing the pressure until Dean was whimpering, until he was opening up for Sam all on his own, allowing him to push his tongue deep and taste the inside of him, the silky smooth heat vibrating with every moan. There was very little finesse in this so Sam didn't attempt it, sucking the rim hard enough to bruise, licking and thrusting, spit sliding down the crease and over Dean's sac, joining the puddle of pre-come on the bed. And throughout it all Dean stayed put, trembling all over, the pillows doing nothing to drown out the moans.

When Sam reached over to find his lips, Dean sucked the offered fingers into his mouth like he was starving, taking them down to the last knuckle, until Sam could feel the back of his throat. It was agonizing, the slick heat of it, the slippery tongue sneaking in between his fingers, the filthy sounds he was making. Sam was already so close that he knew he wouldn't be able to drag this out as long as he wanted to, not with Dean so wet and ready, desperate and compliant, like Sam could do anything to him, like there was no limit to how much he was ready to give. He pulled his fingers away and pushed them against the ring of muscle, both sinking in so easily, the flesh hot and eager for more. Still, he dragged it out as long as he could, licking around them and in between them, stretching him open slowly until he could fit his tongue alongside his fingers and Dean was reduced to a shivering, begging mess, arms jerking against the leather, toes digging into the mattress in an effort not to move.

He whined when Sam moved away, back muscles rippling, head bent low. With numb fingers, Sam found the lube he'd tucked away under his clothes and slicked himself up mindlessly, trying to think of something else, anything else. Lined himself up and pushed, fast and ruthless, bottoming out on the first try. Dean mewled, a sound torn between pleasure and pain, one knee sliding out boneless until Sam grabbed his waist to keep him in place. This time, he didn't stop with one slap, doling out five in quick succession until his wrist ached and Dean was contracting around him, a helpless string of cries leaving his throat. Giving him no time to recover, Sam pulled out almost all the way and slammed back in, fingers digging into him, spreading him open so he could watch the slow drag every time he pulled out, the muscle clutching him tightly, already puffy and swollen. He set a rhythm that was more torture than anything else, hard and

steady, waiting for Dean to slip up again and break the rules. Only when he was sure he wouldn't be able to hold out much longer and Dean's moans were bordering on sobs, he slid his hands under Dean's hips and pulled, lowering him flat on the bed. Stretched out over him, stomach to back, and reached up to feel where his wrists were belted tightly together, secured to the headboard post. Nuzzled into the back of his head, damp with sweat, feeling all that strength and muscle quivering underneath him. Hushed the choked off sobs and hitched breaths. Angled his hips and rocked into him, finally hitting that sweet spot, Dean letting out a sound like he was dying, like he was drowning, his wrists twisting in the restraints until he Sam trapped them in place. Sliding over Dean's sweaty skin he did it again and again, short and sharp thrusts, Dean writhing underneath him, trying to rock back and impale himself deeper, the high pitched noises coming from his throat becoming more desperate by the moment. Sam found himself pressing his lips against the shell of the ear and whispering things he never thought he'd say, a litany of filth, everything he wanted to do to him, dark and twisted and wrong, so far out of any boundaries they might have set, words pouring out of some mindless place he didn't know existed. The orgasm hit him out of nowhere, a far cry from the slow and sweet build up he'd gotten used to with Dean, hard and brutal and edging into pain, like his soul was tearing in half. Dean clamped around him tightly, his cry strangled and raw, the headboard cracking from the pull of his muscles. They rode it out together, skin to skin, fingers tangled in an achingly tight grip, slowing down through the aftershocks. Their frantic breaths echoed in the space that was still spartan, not quite theirs but becoming more so day by day.

Sam was the first to move, muscles weak and unsteady, a faint beginning of a headache settling behind his eyes. He crawled up and unclasped the leather belt, the skin underneath it scraped raw. He'd said no to the handcuffs and no to the ropes, and still, there would be marks that Dean would wear for days. In some way it felt like he'd failed at this, the first thing Dean had asked of him in months. He would have to clean that and wrap it, just in case. Find out if he'd hurt him anywhere else. Sam had made the rules and Dean had looked so ridiculously grateful that they didn't have to talk about it, that Sam would just take care of everything.

He reached over for the bedside lamp and Dean's hand closed over his, stopping him.

"Wait. Hold up."

His voice sounded as scraped and raw as his wrists, thick and dry.

"I need to see Dean, we agreed."

"Yeah ok, but just-- wait a few minutes. Just--"

His fingers were tangling in Sam's hair, pulling him forward and Sam went with it, opening up for him, letting him lick into his mouth, wondering if Dean could taste himself on Sam's tongue, wondering if he could ever fully put into words how much he loved that taste, how wild it drove him.

Dean shifted closer and Sam gave in, pressing his face into the soft skin between Dean's neck and shoulder, tangling their legs together.

"Did I hurt you?"

Dean made a sound and it took Sam a few seconds to figure out it was a chuckle,

"No. No, that was-- perfect."

Sam reached up to trace his lips and found what he was hoping for, that stupid, lazy smile Dean wore when the sex was good, when he was thoroughly satisfied. Felt him press a gentle kiss against his fingertips.

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He was awake before the sunrise, muscles pleasantly sore. For a while he just stared at the ceiling, feeling Sam radiate heat, listening to the whisper of his breath. Listening to the birds chirruping outside and the soft hiss of the gas furnace kicking on. The silence. Studied Sam's face pressed into the pillow, lips swollen from the night before, hair curving around his cheek. Always facing Dean, even in sleep gravitating closer until some part of him was touching Dean's skin. Or maybe Dean was gravitating towards him. He couldn't be sure. He slid out of the bed, silently padding over the lush carpet. They both had a day off and Sam liked sleeping in. Most of the time, Dean would stay in bed too, just so he could see Sam's face when he first wakes up. Those few moments when he wasn't sure where he was or who he was, never quite inching into panic but still unsettling enough for Dean to want to be there when it happens. It never lasted long, and Dean thought it was getting better, the disorientation not nearly as severe as it had been for the first few weeks after. It was supposed to get better, over time. And it had. Dean had been watching him every step of the way. But mornings were always hard. Sometimes Dean wondered if maybe there was something more to it, something that had nothing to do with the tiny cluster of dead cells and everything to do with all those things they refused to talk about or even think about.

He closed the bedroom door carefully so he wouldn't have to worry about making noise in the kitchen. The place wasn't small by any means, at least not to Dean who'd spent most of his life in motels and rented studio apartments, but the sounds carried. Out of the two bedrooms, they'd picked the one nestled at the back of the place, so Sam could bang around all he wanted at five thirty in the morning before heading out to the clinic, and Dean could get an extra hour of sleep before heading out himself. Dean never bothered to tell him that he could still hear it all, the hum of the coffee maker and the crunch of Sam's cereal, even the little tune he hummed to himself when he was getting his lunch ready. He didn't want to sleep through those fragile morning routines. And even after months of normalcy, each one still seemed like a small miracle, none of which he was sure he deserved.

By the time the coffee had finished brewing he could hear the distant roar of a truck. He tugged on his boots and stepped outside to wait, the cup warming his fingers. Made sure he pulled his sleeves down far enough to cover the spotless bandages around his wrists. Around the house, the fields stretched out in all directions, ending at the tree line. About ten acres in total, and all theirs. Or Sam's, even though Sam had insisted on putting Dean's name on the deed.

Bobby's truck crawled down the dirt driveway, avoiding most of the potholes. Dean waved him over to the shed. Watched him get out and measure his surroundings, like he expected to find something Dean missed, like Dean was some damn rookie. Even a month ago, that would've

ticked him off. Now, he just shook his head, figuring old dogs and new tricks was a pretty good description.

"It's been quiet," he said instead of a greeting and Bobby nodded as if he'd expected no less.

"You wanna cup?"

"Nah, had one on the way. Told Ellen I'd be there by noon so let's see what you got."

The shed was good sized and on its way to becoming bigger. Dean had been puttering around it since they've moved in, putting up shelves and clearing out junk. Last week he finally took down most of the south wall and started adding to it, nothing drastic or large, but come winter he wanted to be able to tuck baby away somewhere dry.

"How's Ellen?"

"Better. It's not easy, getting around in a wheelchair. She's getting the hang of it. Still throws shit at me when she's pissed off but she's getting better."

The shed door creaked and Dean made a mental note to take care of that at some point too.

"I took the damn thing apart and put it back together and nothing."

"That's a D160," Bobby said and grinned,

"you're moving up in the world."

"Cause I got a three thousand dollar riding mower that doesn't run?"

"It probably doesn't run cause you took it apart and put it back together."

"Funny. Can you figure out what's wrong with it?"

"Maybe. You clean the carburetor?"

"Bobby, I wasn't born yesterday."

"Yeah ok."

He started in on it, Dean handing him the tools he asked for, not bothering to mention that he'd already done most of the shit Bobby was doing right now. It couldn't hurt to do it again and maybe he'd missed something somewhere what Bobby wouldn't. The fucking thing was dead anyway so how much more damage could they do?

He was half way done with his cup of coffee before Bobby paused to ask the same old question.

"How's Sam?"

"Better."

"He still getting the headaches?"

"Yeah. Not as bad as before. These days a couple of Tylenol do the trick."

Bobby nodded, hands already stained with grease,

"Be careful. There's... things going on."

"What kind of things?"

"Things you don't gotta worry about any more, just make sure you boys stay under the radar."

"What kind of things Bobby?"

Bobby sat back and sighed, rubbing his cheek and leaving a smear of grease.

"A demon, up north. Pretty bad one I guess, making one hell of a mess and not cleaning up after herself. I think it might be one of those that came through the gate. Carl and Olivia are already gone, she volunteered and he went to keep her company. They'll pick up a few more hunters along the way, nothing for you to worry about here."

Dean thought of Sam, sprawled out on the bed, hair spread over the pillow.

"Let me know if she comes any closer."

"I wasn't born yesterday son."

Dean snorted and drank his coffee. Bobby took apart the carburetor and cleaned it again.

Half an hour later, Dean had finished his cup and Bobby was cleaning his hands with a rag, glaring at the mower.

"Three thousand dollar piece of junk. You gotta warranty?"

"Not any more."

"Then scrap it, lord knows it's heavy enough that you'd get a few hundred back."

They walked back out to the sun already up and mist rising above the fields.

"This demon," Dean said, "she gotta name?"

"Lilith. Don't have anything on her yet, but I'm looking."

"Let me know what you find out, doesn't hurt to be ready."

Bobby shot him a sideways glance,

"You know Sam'll never be up to anything like what he pulled off last time."

Dean felt his fingers tighten around the cup,

"All the more reason to be ready. Find ways to keep him safe."

"Yeah, all right. I'll keep you updated. I gotta head out if I'm gonna get there in time. Tell Sam hello for me, huh?"

"Yeah. I'll do that."

He watched Bobby climb into the truck then turned back to the house. The white paint and the window boxes and a welcome mat. Curtains in the windows and a rocking chair on the porch. But it was no use. The peace he'd felt earlier was gone.

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"So here we are."

Sam leaned on the rusty balcony rail and looked down. The road looked cracked and neglected, the asphalt torn. Graffiti covered the building across, the brick underneath them crumbling. Tall walls of abandoned factories reared in the distance, the windows boarded up and rotting slowly. Heavy gray fog had settled on the city and Sam could not tell in which direction the sun should be or if there even was one.

"Detroit, huh?"

He looked over to find Andy leaning too, the rust flaking off the rail and dusting his sneakers.

"Yup, your next stop."



"I was so close," Sam said again, for the millionth time in the last six months, like a prayer he couldn't let go of.

All it would've taken was one more decent push and Azazel would've fallen back into the pit.

There wasn't much he remembered about all those different lives he saw play out, even less since his brain had decided to go on a mini-vacation, but he remembered that clearly. If he'd just managed to trap Azazel back in Hell, everything would've turned out differently. Azazel would've turned his murderous rage on their father, destroying his soul long before John could become the first righteous man to shed innocent blood in Hell.

But instead there had been Dean and the Colt, one bullet changing everything and in the end, changing nothing. The reality curving into the lines it knew, folding into the familiar.

"Hey," Andy's hand clasped his shoulder, "it's not so bad. You did good. You still have a choice you know."

"Yeah," Sam whispered, "I know."

Notes:

So, as many of you have doubtlessly noticed, I suck at responding to comments. My communication skills have always been severely lacking and a lot of times, I find myself unable to form even a simple two word sentence. Which is probably why it took almost a year to finish this story. But I'd like to take this opportunity of rarely available coherency to thank every single person that has commented, left kudos and read my story. I have been scribbling fan fiction in composition notebooks since I was 11 years old and convinced that Lance Bass had major hots for Justin Timberlake, but I've never, in my life, gotten such a breathtaking and overwhelmingly positive response to anything I've written. So, despite the fact that I go mute for weeks at a time, I still read, appreciate and am unfailingly amazed at the comments and support from every single one of you. It means the world to me.

At one point, half way through this story I had decided to make it into a series and take it all the way up to the present Season. It was a brave and unrealistic idea, and although some chapters are already written, chances are, no such thing will happen any time soon. I say this as an explanation for the epilogue, which I feel some people might not be too pleased with. I can promise that if a Series does happen, I will post the entire work when it is finished, instead of stringing it out over months which is equally frustrating for me as well as the readers.

Again, thank you for reading. This story has been with me for so long, the only good part about letting it go is that so many people have found it enjoyable.

ps. the credit for quotes used in the last few chapters as well as the idea of all worlds that are and may be rightfully goes to Robert Jordan's Wheel Of Time series which has definitely inspired some twists in the plot.

